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# RENAASCENCE

A Critical Journal  
of Letters



**The Catholic  
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**Vol. VIII No. 4  
Summer, 1956**

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# RENASCENCE

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# RENASCENCE

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# Paul Claudel: The Poet's Poet

BY LUC ESTANG

**T**HAT I count myself among those who hold Paul Claudel to be a unique genius is indicated in the title of this essay, just as it is suggested that the poet of superlative stature may be recognized. But I shall still have to give reasons, to explain my plan not only of describing Paul Claudel's titles to a certain poetic supereminence, but also to describe this supereminence as such.

Let me begin by observing that, from antiquity to our days, the ideal notion of Poet has never proved to be constant. Depending upon whether we think of Aeschylus, Vergil, Dante, Villon, Shakespeare, Racine, Goethe, Hugo, Baudelaire, or Rimbaud, the abstract image or, if you wish, the ideal significance attached to the word, "Poet," however nebulous it may be, finds ways of assuming shades of meaning. Will it be asserted that this ideal is doomed for this reason, that the vagueness which surrounds it renders it a matter of doubt, that it is founded upon nothing except our more or less discrete preferences or our greater or lesser opportunities? The Poet would not exist, and would there be only poets?

But this imaginary archetype is invoked by the poets themselves! And none of the poets imposes himself as *The Poet* (I give more credit to their human wisdom than to their divine simplicity!). Now one of the Ancients, a Troubadour, a member of the Pléiade, a contemporary of Racine, a Romantic, a Rimbaudian, a Surrealist does not conjure up the same poetic power—if the same capital letter gives presence to this power in all cases. In like fashion, when the word "Poet" is spoken, the public lends to the shadow which rises to be beheld inwardly a presence that conforms to some preconceived ideal—and one that does not reflect as much a conception of Poetry achieved in the work of art as an attitude towards life, a state of Poetry whose puissance is made known by the work of art. Thus the shadow seen and heard by besieged Saul in the cave of Endor was Samuel more than the prophet had been himself!

**C**LAUDEL'S WORK, now that he is dead, is offered to us in its entirety. And it is indeed in the entirety of his work that is lodged his first quality as an author, bound as his authorship was to an essential unity and necessitating as it does a global admiration. One may compare Claudel's work, turn by turn, to a cathedral, to a forest, to an ocean. But it is always the mass that impresses itself, that one must penetrate. There must be a plunge to the center in order to experience it. Precautions based upon taste prove useless here.

So the object of my essay offers itself: to draw from Claudel and his work,

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particularly from the interpretation of it that he himself has taken care to formulate, an example of coherent Poetics. I do not fear to envisage this poetic as a system that welcomes metaphysics, ethics, and esthetics in a single human harmony. When it is fitting, this principal characteristic of Claudel will always be underlined: he balked without fail at cleavages among the parts of man and Man and the other parts of creation. He aspired incessantly to the binding together, to the binding of himself.

And here is what contradicts an infirmity of modern humanism, inherited from the Renaissance—the Renaissance, an organic schism, a cleavage between matter and mind. Today, man's inability to construct, to construct himself, is apparent, like lightning. The spheres of his knowledge, as they are within him, accumulated helter-skelter or in tiny lumps without awareness of what is adjacent, no longer concur in a wisdom that pagan antiquity or the Christian Middle Ages, each according to its order (and these two orders, in spite of their radical differences, never ceased to communicate), were able to attain.

The abundance and variety of these spheres of knowledge are acknowledged. But a unique center of warmth is no longer held in full and constant view. The parallels meet again, but in the center of the earth, where they rest interred. Human faculties are bound the less to each other as they conciliate their anarchial tendencies. So, each man, within, feels himself dislocated, and his apprehension of the world is fragmentized. One of man's most noble activities, art, finds its salvation only in its insurrection not only against the human order, which may appear arbitrary, but also against the natural order, the order divine, with which contact is no longer achieved. Those who pretend to have maintained contact, in the majority of cases, do not have the slightest idea of what is transpiring in our midst. Corpse to corpse! The clinging to academic traditions in art calls nature to witness when this clinging embraces only empty forms that are by their emptiness less understandable than forms contrary to nature in which there move at least the anger and the curse of the artist. But art is separated from life not so much because it makes life grimace, not so much because it denies the counter-balance. Giving itself as an end, it wraps its cause in the shroud of silence.

**A**T THIS POINT in my writing, the reader is still wishing for complete avowals on my part. If not, many of the preceding sentences will irritate him by their veiled dogmatism. Therefore, I shall no longer affect to ignore that this Claudelian poetic, in which I seek the vastness and the rigor of a living dialectic, corresponds to a Christian vision of the universe, to the situation that the Christian man occupies in the universe, and to the understanding that he has of it by his faith. It is faith that lends harmony to what I have taken upon myself to order, and to what I find orchestrated in magnificence

## THE POET'S POET

in Paul Claudel's work. So also shall I confess that the communion of faith favored my discovery and my adhesion to his authorship, for I would betray the Poet by speaking in a different key. Claudel himself wrote, "As for the compliments of artists and those who do not care, they are for me only a humiliation unless I feel that under the veil of sentences and ornaments the sharp barb of truth has reached a too well defended heart."

I do not sit in judgment upon tourists emptying of its significance the religious monument that they are viewing. But I do not mix in with them either, or with the esthetes that pause in admiration of Claudel for merely literary reasons. This is why, speaking of poetic, I have raised my conception of it to the level of the vastest spiritual architecture that has faith as the key to its vault. I have acknowledged this as proper since I have the weakness, even in art, even in poetry, to be concerned with a corresponding metaphysic. I cannot renounce ideas, seeing them or having them; there, where the delight of beholding forms should be enough, begins in fact for me my desire for and sense of completion. But, scarcely enjoyed for its own sake, the object of art seeks and finds my interest as an ontological enigma just as does any other existing thing. If I create the work of art my caprice is answerable to it, for a while; but, sooner or later, it becomes detached enough from me to question me in its turn. On occasion, I state that a poem, for example, is a putting into operation of questions left without answer. There is no way out of it. The Claudelian poetic justifies the work of art, in imitation of all creation, beyond itself.

Let us insist upon it: Claudel rebels instinctively against divisions between things and beings. He wills them joined. He does not see, to tell the truth, any dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural. The one, for him, is but a sign of the other. Not very inclined towards mysticism, whatever one might say, he keeps his feet solidly on the ground (to use an expression so often used in reference to Claudel), because it is on earth that he learns heaven. The Catholic faith has permitted him to secure this happy balance. His *Art poétique* is plain on this point.

THIS *Art poétique* is a rather arduous book that does not lend itself readily to cursory analysis. There are formidable abstractions in it. But let us try to seize some of the dominant ideas.

Holy Scripture declares that visible things are made to bring us to the knowledge of invisible things. This is Claudel's fundamental argument, the mainspring of his thought and art, the mutual fecundation, in him, of poetry and faith. In *Tête d'or* we might have glimpsed him suffering from the fact that visible things, limited to themselves, do not hold a meaning. From the day when he believed in the reality of invisible things, visible things took

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on a sense, and he knew that his vocation was to follow this sense. The two treatises which make up his *Art poétique* (which has nothing to do with prosody!) make us a party to his discovery. One is entitled *Traité de la connaissance du temps* and the other, *Traité de la co-naissance au monde et de soi-même*.

For Claudel, the believer, creation is eternal, and therefore present. It is under this aspect of eternity in attendance that he interprets the universe. Let us recall the splendid page of *Connaissance de l'Est*, where he describes his "juvénile prise de possession du monde".

Let us remember the lamentation by Cébès in *Tête d'or*. Nothing answered his anxious "Why?" But, in all these things he saw, as "the child balanced among the apples," that a resemblance at least existed: nothing lasts. So movement would be a common symbol for them. This unity, this solidarity touched the young Claudel, who in monist philosophy was satisfied at least with a principle of harmony between man and the world. Only monism did not say what business man had with the world. An enigma appeared: nothing lasts and yet everything continues! Once eternity is granted admission, with the implications of its presence, Claudel discovers time as a liaison agent between movement and subsistence. There is then a relationship between two existing bodies that know each other mutually, and it is because they have a knowledge of themselves that they subsist. They re-create each other in mutuality and without end.

The nineteenth century determinism which Claudel had to endure pretended that laws are beneath the existence of things (the legislated universe). "No laws," Claudel would say. He would have only forms, forms variable as much as the positions that things can occupy, each through its bearing back upon the other, like a handle on a vase. Whence it comes about that it is not matter which has primacy of being, but the mind which, itself, is averse to immobility and constrains matter to displacement.

**W**ITH THIS fundamental principle of the *rapport* of things among themselves, we move again into regions that are already familiar: those of analogy, which has replaced syllogism. We return to poetry in the proper sense of the word.

If it be within the realm of grammar to name things by limiting them to a precise and conventional significance, it is up to poetry to name them in order to make them exist beyond this convention. And this is to be done by means of metaphor resulting from the simultaneous and conjoined existence of two different things. It is this that Claudel calls the "co-naissance au monde." He insists upon this idea that nothing exists isolatedly. "Naître," he says, "pour tout c'est co-naître." He stresses the etymological attraction. All *naissance* is

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*connaissance. Surgir: acquérir par l'esprit.* Now, here is the Greek: *genoumai, gignosko.* And the Latin: *nasci, gignero, novi, cognoscere.* And the French: *nâtre, connaître.* Claudel declares, "J'appelle très proprement connaissance cette nécessité pour tout d'être partie d'abord. Cette partie, secondelement, la liberté pour l'homme de la faire, de créer sa position lui-même sur l'ensemble; et troisièmement: cette répercussion qui est de savoir ce qu'il fait."

One could therefore give a condensed account of these two treatises of *la connaissance* and of *la co-naissance au monde* in the following manner.

There is nothing inert in the universe, for movement is not only a local displacement, but includes all variation in existence. So the stone becomes a house. All is movement, therefore all is rhythm. And so each thing acquires a sense of the fact that it does not come from itself. It has a meaning, a sense of bearing to another thing. This *sense* is a flight, a sort of horror made holy by the mind. The sense of creation comes from above, the movement comes from God, Who is totally.

In the beginning was the Word. All parts of the world are ordered in the manner of a discourse that is God's speech. The poet discovers the bonds between differing things. He has this privilege, as a man, to be free, and so to situate himself where he is pleased to know these things. He employs his five senses and his intelligence. He cannot define a thing in itself. But he can define it through reference to himself and by reference to other things, since it exists truly only in this fashion. With words, the poet *summons* things, convokes them. He says "flower." It is here. It is an objective operation, the one we know from classical poetry. With *images*, which define the object thanks to infinite and varied references, he becomes creative in reality, and *co-naissant*. He represents all that passes.

"The world (in this way) is still intact; it is virginal, as it was on the first day, fresh as milk." Man walks into the world; he acquires it, and then he acquiesces within it. He answers an appeal, himself. And this is peculiarly the poet's vocation, for the poet is a bound man (*relié, religieux, reconcilié*). As one of the characters in *La ville* says, "You explain nothing, oh poet, but everything becomes explicable through you."

FROM metaphysical anxiety to faith and to the poetic deciphering of the universe, the intellectual operation moves in a straight line. But people insist upon waiting for the preconceived *stand* in language (vocabulary?) in Claudel's work (it is this preconceived stand in letters, without a doubt, that is most suited to the trashcan) to make its appearance in its turn as a logical consequence. Must a certain mode of expression have to flow of necessity from a certain inspiration? No. But if Paul Claudel's art is more concerned with expressive worth than with beauty's canons, his art and beauty are no less well

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off. However disdainful he might have been about critics who decide about literature, he knew how to oppose to the non-understanding of those who were stopped in their tracks by these given techniques his own arguments in favor of a system of meter, and in favor of a syntax, which are his own belongings in a fashion that is, one might say, *consubstantielle*.

From the first, one must insist again upon the role of the poet, according to Claudel, upon inspiration. He is a decipherer of the world. Let us be direct. The object of poetry, according to Claudel, is "not, as one often says, dreams, illusions, or ideas. It is this holy reality, given once and for all, at the center of which we are placed . . . It is everything that concerns us and that we concern . . . There is a *poeisis perennis* which does not invent themes but which takes up again eternally those that creation furnishes it. The aim of poetry is not, Baudelaire says, to plunge to the limits of the infinite in order to find some newness there, but to the end of the finite to find the inexhaustible."

He comes back to the same theme in regard to Dante: "Thus the dark poet for which Dante furnishes us the type itself is not the one who invents, but the one who puts together and who, in bringing things together, allows us to *comprehend* them." To comprehend is, literally, to take things together. We come again to the idea of *co-naissance*. The poet is he who *co-naît* in the world as it exists, but who gives to it in the same breath an excess of existence, a new existence by acquiring knowledge himself. Things *signify* more than what they are according to the knowledge which defines them in isolation. It is because the poet is given to the harmony of the world that the poet creates it, recreates it, that he acts like God; through his analogy, he *counterfeits* God.

To experience "the attraction of all things," the five senses are required as photographic plates. It is an operation more intuitive than intellectual, more analogical than logical, going less from the effect to the cause than from the sign to the signed, the significant. And so we are again faced with the problem of expression.

If metaphors are justified by the theory of *la co-naissance au monde*, the verse is justified by the theory of time, or of movement, of rhythm.

Claudel takes the following as his premise, that everybody accepts: "un vers est une idée isolée par du blanc." This is a way of setting poetry against prose. Prose is objective knowledge; poetry is subjective joy. A "blanc" is needed, and a time too, and a measure so that the reader will comprehend, enjoy. This time, this measure is produced by the "inner metronome," as he says, "le coup de notre pompe à vie, le cœur qui bat l'iambe fondamental un temps *faible* et un temps *fort*."

(Continued on page 188)

# Claudel, Poet Believer

BY M. MARTHE LAVALLÉE

ALTHOUGH Claudel's *Art poétique* was called by Georges Duhamel the strangest "ars poetica" of the twentieth century by virtue of its dealing with neither art nor poetry as such, there are few who would deny that it is a statement basic to Claudel's artistic creed. Within its three treatises Claudel erected a cosmology that justifies and defines his role as poet. It is a visionary and systematic essaying of an apologia that arose out of a decade of conflict and doubt. The early plays, *Tête d'Or* and *La Ville*, show us two sides of the poet: first the pagan "mystique à l'état sauvage" in the manner of Rimbaud, damned to incompleteness and defeat because he recognized no power greater than his own ambition, no achievement nobler than his own usurpation; the second, the delicate, Christianized *Cœuvres* whose function in the City of Earth is mysterious and unknowable and who must leave the city to meet a personal destiny. The last decade of the century, while he roamed Europe, America and Asia pursuing his diplomatic career, was the epoch of Claudel's uncertainty, hesitation and moral turmoil. In his inmost self, he felt the living certitude that the poet is the first seeker after completion and in his highest function strives to express as beautifully as possible the reality he loves. Claudel was ever a passionate lover of the world's beauty. Specifically as a convert to Catholicism he believed reality to be entirely contingent and himself to be called to another world, immaterial and all-demanding. His studies of the liturgy, of Aquinas and of world literature, his own plays that were experiments in human destiny, revealed the bitter futility of possession of the world for its own sake. His early heroes, *Tête d'Or*, the gambler who lost all, including his life, in an act of self-redemption, Louis Laine of *L'Echange*, whose revolt is ended by a jealous shot, and even the poet *Cœuvres* who is not yet integrated into worldly life and the Christian scheme of life, lacking an essential part of it, all possessed with the "esprit terrestre" as Rivière said, are doomed from the very start. Not that theirs is a detestable fate, nor even an unenviable one; they are simply foreordained to failure.

We know how Claudel returned from China to the Benedictine monastery of Ligugé in 1900 with the intention of entering the cloister and his immediate recognition that his offer was refused. He learned in sorrow and solitude that, rather than sacrifice his art to the life of prayer, he must reconcile the two. What Claudel knew as a Christian must find expression in the art that he as poet could create. Man, like the rest of reality, defines everything by the very fact of his existence, for he de-limits, but then no more than the rose defines the rest of the garden. But man's mode of definition and therefore of knowledge (*connaissance*) through co-existence (*co-naissance*) or affinity is peculiar to him.

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Man alone creates art; he is the only animal who names objects by means of matter. Man's operations are relatively unlimited, at least in the hierarchy of material existence where they are all-inclusive. He is not bound by the syllogism of logic nor even by the dictates of science which remain as a useful tool, a mnemotechnical device that collates and classifies tangible areas of knowledge and co-existence. Moreover, man has conscience, a higher form of consciousness, and knows the sense (*sens*) of all reality, that is *sens* conceived at once as direction, motion and *in extenso*, its significance or meaning which is synonymous with its origins and destiny.

THOSE prose poems which constitute the two parts of *Connaissance de l'Est*, 1895 to 1900 and 1900 to 1905, are a series of exercises in seizing the quintessence of existence, grasping poetic relationships rather than mathematical sums; they use the new vehicle of poetry, the metaphor and not the syllogism, to clarify and plumb rapports which only man envisions in their vital proximity. While Mallarmé's search for full being led pessimistically to non-being, Claudel discovered an enraptured expression of all being through his conflict that surged between 1889 and 1907, a struggle between an inner necessity to write and an urge toward sublimation of egoistic self and abnegation of the world. The esthetics of Claudel and his spiritual convictions are usually described as unified, and critics, in writing of his work, constantly shift from the vocabulary of one to the other. The works of his first years of creative writing are enlightened by reference to later ones, belonging to the period of calm. But there is often a tendency to gloss over the gradual, painful character of the fusion of his attachments. His poetic ideal, legacy of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and his religious vocation, the irrevocable "Je crus," first clashed and then were resolved forever, but it was a day-to-day combat that cannot be measured in contrasting blocks of years. The young athlete of the *Odes*, vigorous and proud, who yields to supreme force, nonetheless displayed genuine reluctance to abandon an enchantingly self-centered ideal.

Claudel thus does in fact define the nature of the poet in *Art poétique*, if only by implication. Though he wrote in a letter to the *Figaro* in 1914 that he followed no esthetic plan but sought simply to override as directly as possible the difficulties of self-expression with "quelques recettes personnelles et bien modestes de praticien," he does create the image of the poet and the man arrived at in the *Odes* only through the ratiocinations of *Art poétique*. The five odes—"Les Muses," "L'Esprit et l'Eau," "Magnificat," "La Muse qui est la Grâce," and "La Maison fermée,"—followed by the "Processional pour saluer le siècle nouveau," are at one and the same time the trajectory followed by the poet himself during the long years of confusion and struggle for mastery, the plan for his future and the statement of serenity achieved, and ultimately the story of all men redeemed by Grace. The titles themselves are signposts in our

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discovery of Claudel's vision. The Muses, inspired by the now famous sarcophagus in the Louvre, are everything that calls to man, his reeling discovery of the beauty in the world, the staggering delight his senses and mind provide in a universe of sensuous beauty and unplumbed possibilities, the energizing and frenetic dance of creative activity. The poet is galvanized by the enchantment of man's own creation which far exceeds his grasp.

Présence créatrice! Rien ne naîtrait si vous n'étiez neuf!

The intoxication is maintained and heightened in "L'Esprit et l'Eau," the strong attraction that fully attains the expression of self, the ultimate in human ambition and the pervasive idealization of man's own spirit, knowing itself as both interior to the world as the noblest level of existence and exterior to it by his very solubility within it, and an irresistible call to a higher, invisible reality. The water is the maternal element, fecundating and filling all, it is the element ever seeking itself, it is blood and tears, it is the spiritual fluid.

"Magnificat" is the humble, exultant pæan of praise for a gift freely bestowed and freely accepted in the undeniable recognition of dependence that flows from the poet before an ineffable presence, the crucial step in the evolution from belief through domination to belief in joy. "La Muse qui est la Grâce" seals the pact between the poet who still wilfully maintained his personal entity and his Muse who is fully discovered in her nature as grace, a mystical inspiration dwelling far higher than Parnassus. The poet is no longer worshiping the golden calf of human inventiveness; he is almost prostrate before the awesome gift; he cavils, he protests, finally he confesses. Those critics who, like Mauriac, see in Claudel's plays only two protagonists, God and man, are quite right. But they forget that Claudel's is not a spiritual determinism. Listen to the poet clutching the hard-won things of the earth, shouting his defiance, pleading for the light he rejects:

Je ne veux point! va-t'en de moi un peu! ne me tente pas ainsi cruellement.

Ne me montre point

Cette lumière qui n'est pas pour les fils de la Terre!

Cette lumière-ci est pour moi, si faible qu'il faut la nuit pour qu'elle m'éclaire, pareille à la lampe de l'habitaclle!

(*La Muse qui est la Grâce*)

The Muses speak to him, still ensnared in the "Ténèbres de l'intelligence," the "ténèbres de mon cœur mauvais"; impatient with his blindness, tried by his vacillation, they remind him of his promise and his mission to be the creator.

Poète, tu nous trahis! Porte-parole, où portes-tu cette parole que nous t'avons confiée?

Voici que tu passes à l'ennemi! Voici que tu es devenu comme la nature et ton langage autour de nous aussi privé d'attention pour nous que les collines.

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Nous demandions que tu achèves avec ton esprit ces choses ici qui ne  
sont pas complètes. (La Maison fermée)

The last ode is not the hermetic house of the poet who speaks only for himself or even only to his peers, but the home of the man who has at last found the only foyer where he can be at peace with himself and the world. Though he answers the Muses that he is no longer the poet but simply the man who every morning opens his eyes on Paradise, he affirms the seamless nature of reality.

O point de toutes parts autour de moi où s'ajustent les fins  
indivisibles! univers indéchirable! ô monde inépuisable et fermé!  
(La Maison fermée)

He has lost none of his wonder at the multiform display of life about him, none of his liberty to act and speak, none of his passion; he has gained the deeper and moving spirit which gives movement to the dance of the Muses, a sense of its meaning which, if lacking, leaves only self-exhaustion. Claudel added the slow-moving, liturgically paced "Processional pour saluer le siècle nouveau" as the coda to the odes, closing the cycle which sums up his past and future program and as a salute to the opening of a new century that would be revivified by faith. It forms an almost anti-climactic prelude to the decades ahead of him as a working poet and dramatist.

WHEN one studies Claudel's work, it is clear that while there is a rapid, tormented development during these first ten to fifteen years, marked by turmoil and doubt, there was never any real revolution after his conversion of 1886. Rebellion, hesitation, secret misgivings as to his worthiness, yes, but also a progression and growing clarity in his conviction that poetry and prayer as the expression of the poet and Christian are parallel and not antagonistic.

The five magnificent *Odes* were written during long months of travel and diplomatic agitation, during repose and ennui, loneliness and passionate involvement. They were written almost side by side with the metaphysical structure of *Art poétique*; they profit from the brush strokes, short and precise, of *Connaissance de l'Est*; they reflect the lyric expansion of the plays, and they predict the parabolic nature of the plays and poems that were to come. It would be a difficult and thankless task to assay how much the odes owe to the prose poems. One of the first characteristics of Claudel's work to be noted by critics was his effort to unify human experience. The prose poems of this collection are more than lyric descriptions in the Parnassian manner of objects and picturesque scenes. They are the result of remarkable artistic sensitivity and verbal mastery. More, they are the outcome of wonder and lyric joy at the sights and sounds, smells and touch of the essence of reality. Each panel, from the pig entering his wallow to the graceful open architecture of the pagoda, is the minute and detailed study of some phase of life.

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But the Muse who is Grace reproaches the poet who stands before her, the selfish little clerk, full of his own importance and talent, as Claudel described the autobiographical Mesa of *Partage de midi*, in stinging words:

—Que m'importent toutes vos machines et toutes vos œuvres et vos livres et vos écritures?

O vraiment fils de la terre! ô pataud aux larges pieds! ô vraiment né pour la charrue, arrachant chaque pied au sillon!

(La Muse qui est la Grâce)

Thus his muse addresses him derisively, belittling his ridiculous ambition, his sense of puny accomplishment, blasting his immense pride in his small stature. A higher ideal, stated by the poet himself in an earlier ode, comes from outside himself, but even now it seems to demand complete divorce from the earth. Claudel's doubts are patent before an idea he can only mouth, which he still does not seem to comprehend. The poet, creature, turned his eyes to creation and saw in it a beauty and infinite variety that came from his own Creator, a splendor far beyond esthetic pleasure. Prayer remained the expression of his personal relationship to God, but in poetry alone he felt he could pour out the wonder and enthusiasm of his own experiences.

Ah, je suis ivre! ah, je suis livré au dieu! j'entends une voix en moi et la mesure qui s'accélère, le mouvement de la joie,

L'ébranlement de la cohorte Olympique, la marche divinement tempérée!

(La Muse qui est la Grâce)

Still sounding out the beat that first set his creative impulses afire, his Muse was the promise that cannot be kept in this world, the unattainable like Lalâ of *La Ville*, the protean woman. With the dawning realization that the two master threads of his life were drawing closer to entwine in a single, perfect pattern, that the poet need not war with the Christian within himself, Claudel received fuller bounty than he had dreamed, like the Saint Francis of his later poem who was given all because he gave up everything.

Wandering the clamoring cities of the world, now Asia, later South America and Europe, he observed society; the poet interrogated the world, seizing a detail, yet encompassing its variety, sensing the overtones of light and dark, the color cast by sun and rain, seeking the one note on which the rest hangs in suspension; and the world, he had found, reflects the glory of its Maker. He listened to creation in order to render that testimony it is forever giving in human terms. The *Odes*, like Claudel's existence, are a dialogue, a question answering a question. Unlike the "artiste échevelé" and Rimbaud, he need not have recourse to hallucination in order to blast new paths, for life is an ever-changing tableau. As poet, he was freed from the bonds of conventional poetry by his immediate predecessors, yet his beliefs taught him the solidarity of the universe. United in the soul and imagination of the poet-believer, the double

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vision of creation was transformed into an artistic reality of both spiritual and esthetic significance. In this retreat within himself, face to face with his exile, doubly measured as man seeking his eternal destiny and as a permanent exile from his home in the far posts of the diplomatic globe, Claudel found in himself the valid judge for whom the world was created. The exercises of the past were constant practice for the poet who can portray all reality.

Poète, j'ai trouvé le mètre. Je mesure l'univers avec son image que je constitue.  
(*La Maison fermée*)

As the creation of the supreme good, the world is of awesome import to man, the source of his knowledge to be embraced with fury and the transport of total desire. The poet seeks God's earth, not man's impress upon it. Physical appetites are jading and if we dwell only on the particular, the created order, we find nothing but disorder. The artist's sensitivity must not refuse to follow his objective (here, religious) knowledge of reality. More and more, Claudel equates the two aims of his life, poetry and saintliness. The artist who deviates from the greater to paint the lesser out of all proportion to the ensemble creates monstrous and false pretentiousness just as the *Tête d'Or* attained only oblivion by violating order.

**W**ITHIN the odes the echoes arise time and again of his own physical experiences and his long years spent tracking from post to post, making him "un exilé, un isolé," the very symbol of man in exile from God. Like himself, standing on the yellow shores of China, beneath the exotic skies of Rio, the cozy cities of northern Europe, the poet, far from his hearth, may lessen the distance by seeing better the ensemble, by grasping the significance of life more clearly than those who are part of its tumbling activity. The world communicates to man its order, its harmonious vision of variety by the suggestion of infinity. In this life, if an equation may be drawn, it is not the repetition, Beauty is Beauty is Beauty, but beauty is truth is being is universality. Therein the poet is satisfied by his desire for the possession of totality. The purified and calm knowledge of this unity is not attained without torment; the bitterness of separation grows at every step of the way and the poet cries out, after momentary submission to the "Esprit" which is water, "NON." The poet-exile is lonely, at times misunderstood, but despite his deprivation and solitude, he assumes a lonely grandeur. He returns, never the same, and his friends greet in him only the image of the past, for there is an irrevocable change brought about by the passing of time and space, so subtly and movingly evoked in several passages of *Connaissance de l'Est*. For the poet has heard the message of the Muses, he has been invited to return with them to his original function as man, the delegated creator who, through the word, shares in the fantastic creative power of God.

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Quand Il composait l'Univers, quand Il disposait avec beauté le Jeu,  
quand Il déclanchait l'énorme cérémonie,

Quelque chose de nous avec lui, voyant tout, se réjouissant dans son œuvre,

Sa vigilance dans son jour, son acte dans son sabbat!

Ainsi quand tu parles, ô poète, dans une énumération délectable  
Proférant de chaque chose le nom,

Comme un père tu l'appelles mystérieusement dans son principe,  
et selon que jadis

Tu participas à sa création, tu coopères à son existence (Les Muses)

Man's creative role in the universe has its source in his centripetal position between brute matter, changing and dying, and pure Spirit, immutable and infinite, for he brings everything within himself and transforms it. God "needs" man because in making him the crown of the universe, He made him its spokesman. The poet, crying out in the exaltation of his freedom above the world, having his share or *partage* with the creating force, "l'esprit liquide et lascif," is the verifier of the universe, the "Inspecteur" of the world as we find him in *Connaissance de l'Est*, the sole being as defined in *Art poétique* who expresses a "sentiment de la tige" or mysterious union with all existence. The *word* is the "formule transmutatrice" that exists for each being uniquely, and each thing has its inviolate place in the symphony of existence.

"Point de touche qui ne comporte la mélodie toute entière!" Conventional appellation which is the tool of daily life is relative and utilitarian, but variations in language play no part in the validity of the "word" save in their individualization of concepts in time and space. Philological differences are merely historical or geographical phenomena. When a poet calls a thing by its name, he is speaking of its being and of its *sens*. In uttering the name, he recalls the object of life, his whole attention riveted on its essence in an intuitive imitation of God's investment of it with being. Language, whatever its transiency, is a permanent endowment by God to enable the poet to partake in His own creation. The Greek *poiesis* is taken by Claudel as the literal transcription of the poet's function. The quintessence of the poet's creation that makes change and flux a vital part of existence is its character of becoming. Since the universe is in constant motion, there is continued opportunity for recreation. Nothing is static and the poet can, must create indefinitely and infinitely as his imagination allows. His task is never done; he salutes each day, each new breath with the memory of the past clear before him, yet he wipes out the past in the fresh vision of the kaleidoscope of reality, for, as he said, our patrimony is never exhausted, reality never repeated.

Salut donc, ô monde nouveau à mes yeux, ô monde maintenant total!

O credo entier des choses visibles et invisibles, je vous accepte avec  
un cœur catholique! (L'Esprit et l'Eau)

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The unity of existence is horizontal, everything defining and harmonizing with everything else throughout time and space, and vertical, everything here below being, not the illusion of the Hindus, but *allusion* to the eternal. The dualism of the poet as recipient man and as creator is given by Claudel in the striking image of man as the musical instrument which at once creates a tone and is modified by it through resonance.

Quand l'homme est à la fois l'instrument et l'archet,  
Et que l'animal raisonnable résonne dans la modulation de son cri!  
(Les Muses)

In this recreation, the thing is removed from material contingency, for the word is an abstraction by which the poet enables reality to rid itself of deterioration and erosion in time. The poet echoes the primary Fiat that brought existence out of nothingness; now the poet utters the symbol of existence, investing it with the mystic force of essential reality, soaring above convention and death. The Muse who is Grace enables him to transform words into a higher degree of being than the thing itself which will decay.

BUT the mere enunciation of words, however much charged with significance by the poet, is a tenuous thing in isolation. A single word vibrates with meaning; two single words, side by side, heavy with direction and sense, are inclined to scatter. The poet's speech has a deeper tensile strength through the intra-complementary nature of things, as divined in *Art poétique*, for each object has an affinity with the rest of existence. The poet must take within his ken the vast network of rapproches and spell out the world with all its vastness and minute detail, a labor of incessant renovation. He is more than the schoolboy cataloguer of names. The poet absorbs the world, hence the necessity of his exile, then he returns to restore it in a synthetic remodeling. It is a blended, personalized synthesis in which the personality of the poet is not lost.

The poet is not the slave of his senses. He opens new visions through the medium of his images. The words are his tools, but the manner of using them depends on his will and imagination. He does not write sentences in the manner of the meanest merchant who employs them as exchange. The poet cries out for inspiration to the Muses that his verse be free as the soaring eagle and the foaming sea. The "Muses modératrices" prevent him from blindly flying off in his unbridled imagination; they force him to turn his talents outward to the world whence comes his knowledge; they stop him from wallowing in a chaos of inarticulate delight.

The poet uses the new tool of *Art poétique*, the metaphor, the explosive juxtaposition and intuitive acceptance of things as they are and co-exist, with a glimpsed association. As he said in his essay, blue "knows" orange, the matter spirit. In the concrete reality of the world, Claudel sees more than static re-

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lationships and conventional likenings; he is the master of a dynamic syntax of nature that dares to oppose and equate startlingly different things; the poet reunites in his work terms that are found in life and in which are latent affinities. The visible world is itself the metaphor for the invisible reality, and the word is its expression and link. The metaphor is that of an "evangelized" universe, the secret meaning recreated by the poet in his creative powers as a co-operator. The whole poem itself is a sign, a symbol of the universe, witness of creation both before men and to God. Claudel's symbolism embraces the universe *in toto*, each particle within being a unique metaphor for the rest of the world. His symbols and metaphors are changing, fluid and dialectical.

The poem alone, moreover, does not stand by itself. Since reality is indivisible, that part of reality which is spiritualized in the poem includes the rest which is not stated. The blank, the very white of the paper that so disastrously dismayed Mallarmé, is integrated by Claudel into his poem. The "blanc" is envisioned as the white of the paper on which the pen itself writes as a sun dial, shedding the shadow of the human spirit, the "vide" or empty space, the margin inviting to thought, reflection and emotion. It is also the space that binds the whole together, for the poem is more than the sum of its parts, and it allows the blank to be reserved for the reader who rests and absorbs the poem, tasting its "savar," unconsciously savoring all the unsaid affinities and allusions, all the unused and unrealized possibilities of development, the infinitesimal silence between past and present, the unbridgeable gap between present and future.

The poem's construction, as all amateurs of Claudel know, is a highly personal one, using the long line of variable measure, the famous "iambe" of Claudelian verse. Not number, but balance, is the key to his verse. So intimately did Claudel feel the need of balance rather than arithmetical count that in the very first pages of the five *Odes*, he makes Mnemosyne the figure of equilibrium.

Elle est le poids spirituel. Elle est le rapport exprimé par un chiffre  
très beau. Elle est posée d'une manière qui est ineffable

Sur le pouls même de l'être.

(Les Muses)

He attempts to reflect in the varied measure of the so-called "verset" of his poems a triple series of phenomena; the first, a physiological accent given in French of heights and depressions within word groups, a musical pitch that embraces the content groups, and longer and shorter vowels, according to their place in stress or unstressed syllables; secondly, a psychological manifestation that also weds the content, the grouping of phrases according to their emotional complexes inherent in syntactical groups, a grouping varied and used by the poet of genius without conscious effort in the very flow of words and inimitable by any stretch of the imagination in a man without that talent. Finally, this ebb and flow of the verse, this tonic and atonic rhythm of sound within the verse,

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reflecting the intake and outgo of human respiration which governs the length of the line (untrammelled by syllabic count) is the basic rhythm of nature, the systole and diastole of the universe. Claudel attempts to reconstruct in verse the spontaneous ejaculation of speech, the flow of human respiration in a self-propelled and self-dictated rhythmic balance that advances in spurts, in perfect concordance with its own content. The single line, mechanical, grammatically cut, is a collector's rarity in Claudelian odes; the verse is generally a long line, often enclosing subordinate clauses, or the beginning of a main clause, with subordinates and phrases interjected as single verses, completed only in a following line.

The structure of the *Odes* has been suggested as symphonic in nature. The poet wrote after the culmination of the poetic synthesis between his two functions, or rather, his two-fold mission, poet and saint. In the privileged place between God and creation, more keenly alive to the human powers than ordinary men who are often too immersed in the grubby details of life to see its vast panorama and beauty, Claudel was in exile in China. As though above the world, yet still of it, he grasped the significance of reality and of his own existence. In "Magnificat" he introduces the realm of the spiritual as such, greater than the spirit suggested in water, whether seen as the single drop or as the enormous streams of the five continents rushing together into the infinite sea. But this spiritual grace is still superimposed on the world of matter and poetic inspiration. The union and amalgamation of the two worlds, the real juncture of spirit and water is operated in "La Muse qui est la Grâce." The pull exerted on him by physical existence and the higher aspirations already known are found to be but a single reality; they fulfill the promise of the second ode. The poet has gone through the inner conflict and escaped the peril of choosing an alternative by synthesizing the two. All the themes sweep to the surrender before this Muse who has removed all her veils. The poet's individuality, the fervor and activity of the world, the eternity of the arts—all are correlated and recapitulated in "La Maison fermée" and the poet sees that it is not less his duty to make this clear to the reader. Claudel does so by consolidating the two worlds throughout the poem while at the same time he poetically relates his personal struggle. Thus while the poet speaks everywhere, we hear the Muses speak as he once heard them. Though the biographical and spiritual events depicted occurred over a period of years, Claudel compressed them into a few pages, omitting any not relevant. The outcome is suggested to the reader by the very titles and much of the symbolism, especially water of the second ode. The epic issue is viewed from the vantage point of the calm that followed it. At last in "La Maison fermée" the poet draws the dual theme to a close, suggesting the finite nature of the universe, the intimate and indestructible oneness of man's being in which there is no frontier between body and soul and

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the nature of poetic grace. It is poetic *grace* which concludes the odes rather than poetic genius or even a pagan divine fury, because inspiration is the mirror of spiritual enlightenment.

THE five odes together are a total poem, lyric by their transformation of real events into the controlled emotion of song. We follow the poet's combat over the face of the globe, but we are conscious throughout that the poem is a transposition of that self-searching into highly charged emotional expression.

The *Cinq Grandes Odes* make a total poem even more completely by breaking down the boundaries between dramatic and lyric verse. The poet's wrestling is recounted dramatically enough so that the reader understands the nature of the struggle, understands that it is a personal story and not mere allegory. It includes the dramatic moments of youth, when the poet, descending the "longues rues amères" of the Quartier Latin, in his lonely bitter walks from the Sorbonne down the rue Saint-Jacques to the tiny island, like the Olympian wrestler of "Magnificat" came, silent among his materialist "handlers" or professors, to the area of his spiritual combat. We see him walking away the weary hours along the crumbling walls of Peking and its shadow empire, his dreary travels on the ocean, the moment of sudden confession in the lighted cathedral amid a jostling crowd. At the same time, the drama is rendered in lyric terms, for Claudel wrote after the events, sometimes almost two decades later, sometimes while still quite close to them and still undergoing their emotional shock. The psychological and spiritual agitation is rendered by the dithyrambic verse, the tumultuous flood of images and the lyric description of the events' setting—France, China, America, the sea. Thus the personal lyric becomes dramatic with the entire world as its setting.

The poem, moreover, is the recreation of the poet's story on a universal scale, the story not only of Paul Claudel who is never named, but of the Poet, of Everyman. The personal and particular is fused into the universal, achieving, says Charpentier, the dream of the nineteenth century poets by fusing idea and emotion, the particular and the universal. Claudel fills his role as heir of Rimbaud, the "seer" or "voyant" of another world than that of the bric-a-brac of conventional verse. He fulfills the promise of the Symbolists (whoever they were) of expressing through the particular the unseen reality of the ideal. Claudel more than keeps the promise of *Art poétique* to reveal the cohesiveness of the poetic, lyric and particular with the spiritual and immaterial world in terms of a man who unites the rational ideas of thinking man with the instinctive aspirations rising out of his emotions and imagination. But the Poet, mindful of his fraternity with other men, prays that he may become the "semeur de ténèbres," a man without face among men, "un semeur de la mesure de Dieu."

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The totality of the world, infinite in its finiteness, eternal in its origins and splendid in its end, becomes a sacrificial offering through an exalted sense of the poet's quasi-priesthood. And the poem is itself the creative act, product of the poet's essential activity, for it is the actual process of creation that most interests Claudel and which he portrays throughout the five odes. There is only one time within the poem—the eternal present. The creative work becomes the poem of the creation of the poem; the poem is its own subject, repeating, modifying, recasting the original themes. All these elements are present together, mingled in the imagery and the liberated vocabulary, associated with one another, yet individually recognizable. Certainly the *Cinq Grandes Odes* are one of Claudel's greatest claims to contemporary attention and perhaps to his lasting repute as a poet.

### Paul Claudel: The Poet's Poet

(Continued from page 176)

And he adds that all spoken language is made of verse in the crude state. Poetry is natural. It is prose that is conventional, when writing drowns sound in what is intelligible. So he proposes the parable of *Animus*, the mind which possesses nothing but which has learned all, and *Anima*, the soul which knows nothing but which possesses all, which possesses the secret of song. In this system, finally, "The soul is silent as soon as the mind looks at it."

In connection with Dante, Claudel has defined the characteristics of the great poet. He must possess inspiration, with whatever illumination this term contains, and the gift of prophecy; intelligence, to organize his discoveries; catholicity, in the sense of universality of the creative representation, of which minor poets give only a single phase. The entire work, for which the *Art poétique* describes the solid spiritual architecture, makes manifest that these three characteristics can be applied without hesitation to Paul Claudel himself.

TR. SPIRE PITOU

# Paul Claudel and Theology

BY REV. RAYMOND BRUCKBERGER, O.P.

**I**T IS SAID that photography has liberated painting, and it is true that the painter no longer has to subject himself to the utilitarian and slavish copy of a landscape or of a human model. If we wish to preserve the exact documentary picture of a face or of a scene, a Kodak is more adequate than Rembrandt or Holbein. The task of the painter is different: it is not to reproduce but to create.

In a development parallel to this evolution of modern painting, we witness a similar liberation of poetry which is initiated in the works of Rimbaud and of Mallarmé, and which assumes, in the works of Paul Claudel and of Paul Valéry, perfection and freedom of form and a full consciousness of its possibilities. The exact sciences have liberated poetry. The needs for exactitude and material observation are today so splendidly satisfied by rigorous scientific methods and precise laboratory instruments that all the eagerness of the poets can take possession of the world and devour its substance without incurring the risk of comprising an objective reality which is still safeguarded by science. Poetic knowledge has no other allegiance than to itself, and to its own method of integrating the universe. It would be primitive and barbaric to require from it an exactitude to which it lays no claim. This does not mean that poetic knowledge neglects scientific exactitude, but it cannot become subservient to it. It will utilize it in a higher sphere. I am thinking here of that exuberant picture of the Renaissance by Claudel, so much truer, at this artistic level, than the historical novel.

Claudel presents the *Soulier de Satin* in the following words:

The setting of this drama is the world and more specially Spain at the end of the Sixteenth or perhaps at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century. The author has taken the liberty to compress countries and periods, just as at the proper distance several distinct mountain ranges form a single horizon.

I have in mind also that enormous accumulation of senses and allusions that the Bible has inspired in Claudel, has impressed in his mind, as an active river deposits its alluvial soil. Claudel has given us all this in commentaries which have the delightful flavor of his old age. But one would expose oneself to serious disappointments if one were to expect from these commentaries a literal exegesis which is only presupposed to these parables. In fact, in the case of the Bible as in the case of nature, Claudel works and speaks at their sides, so to speak, in concert and in communion with them, by allusions to

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what they are and to what they say, proceeding in the same manner as they, at once sublime and unforeseeable.

In one of the pages of *Connaissance de l'Est*, which I do not quote verbatim but whose terms I use, Claudel, while explaining the art of the Chinese and of the Japanese, explains his own art. Claudel, the artist, has mastered subtly these delightful laws whereby the features of a landscape are assembled like those of a physiognomy; instead of copying nature, he imitates it, and with the very elements which he borrows from it, as a law is revealed by concrete examples, he reproduces, as it were, counterfeit scenes. Claudel imitates nature or the Bible according to the means that he borrows from them; he does not describe them nor does he explain them. He is not a student being taught; in a sense, he is a master. He does not intend to reproduce in its detail the teaching which is imparted by the Bible, but taking in the scene with a mirror of the mind, he brings out the law, and in the freedom of his imagination, he applies it with scriptural conciseness. The first inspiration of the poet is here the matter to which he applies himself. He is inspired joyfully by its intrinsic qualities and, appropriating to himself the very soul of things, he appoints himself their interpreter. In the tale that he evolves, he expresses only the essential and significant features of things; he entrusts to the poem alone, or to the parable, the task not of expressing but of hiding the infinite complexity of the object which is here only implied or suggested.

THE ENTIRE Thomistic esthetics may be condensed in a formula which accounts perfectly for Claudelian poetry. Art imitates nature. But, as it happens often in the case of philosophic formulae, that sentence would be erroneous if it were not taken in the sense in which it was originally contrived, and in its metaphysical purity. There can be no reference here to what was called "nature" in the Nineteenth Century, the primitive spectacle of things which entranced Châteaubriand. We are concerned with the entire creation in reference to its Creator. So that what the artist imitates principally is the Author of Nature, His mode of action and of creation: God does not copy, He creates and impresses on every thing the seal of His intelligence and of His beauty. He creates every thing in harmony with everything else; He brings forth from nothingness a whole, independent of everything, depending solely on Him, of which He combines all the elements which He destines to His glory. No one more than Claudel communicates such a feeling of universality in his composition: he balances all the strophes of an ode, all the scenes of a drama in view of a final impression of a concrete harmony and total upsurge. His work is subordinated only to himself and to what he wants it to be; but it is he who is attuned to the universe, because he conceives himself as the image of the Principal of the Universe. "Poets, I have found the yard stick; I measure the universe with its own image, which I create."

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It is he, the poet, who is the image of the world and from that creative archetype are born the constellations of parables and the inexhaustible harmony of words. In such a manner, one may reverse the comparison and say that God acts like a human artist and that the creature should behave like the word in the poem and the note in a symphony.

Jacques Madaule has put on the title page of his book on Claudel the following line from St. Bonaventure: *Creaturae possunt considerari ut res vel ut signa*. Creatures may be considered in their stark reality and in their proper nature, absolute, as it were; in what they are in themselves. Or they may be considered as various symbols, composed of another invisible and sublime Reality, God, whose creation, and therefore whose witnesses, they are, for what they suggest of God to us.

No more appropriate sentence could have been recalled in reference to Claudel; yet it needs to be properly interpreted. Saint Bonaventure situates himself in an Augustinian tradition which is, above all, a mystic tradition. He considers creatures only inasmuch as creatures may reveal to him something of God. As soon as he possesses God, he has nothing further to ask from creatures, and he does not need all the creatures to possess God; a few suffice which are forthwith transcended by analogy. It is God alone whom he seeks in all things, and God suffices him in all things.

But Claudel is not a mystic. He even mistrusts mystics. His vocation is not purely contemplative; it is also active. It is towards things that he proceeds at the head of numerous troops of words. To be sure, he seeks ultimately God alone, and he considers the world according to the order imposed upon it by God. But he seeks God in his works, yet not in a merely speculative quest. Claudel has assumed towards all things the mission to bring them back to God in revealing to each of them its own divine calling, in giving to the world another poetic expression, a Christian expression, in manifesting in the entire creation a second universe similar to the first, a universe of explicit praise and of acknowledged harmony.

Claudel says to God: "These things which You have created, You judge that they don't belong to You as long as we are not here to give them to Your Son." There could be no more accurate expression of Claudel's mission. If the hero of the *Soulier de Satin*, or Christopher Columbus, desire so ardently to discover the entire truth, and if they abandon it finally in an homage to the King of Spain, such a conquest and such a surrender are the symbols of the evangelization of the universe which define, in Claudel's own words, his poetic vocation.

Augustinian lyricism is closely contained between two persons: God and I. It is completely expressed by this prayer of St. Augustine: "God; let me know You and let me know myself." If the world intervenes, it can be only through

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one or the other of the two participants in that dialogue, and only to the extent that they are involved in the world for the outcome of the dialogue. It is true that the soul is satisfied by limiting itself to the knowledge of God. God being all in a perfect degree makes up for everything and substitutes eminently for all which is not He. But nevertheless the universe remains outside of mystical knowledge.

On the contrary, Claudelian lyricism requires essentially that it appropriate the entire universe, and that it widen itself to the very dimensions of heaven and earth.

I who so loved things visible. Oh! I would have wished to see all,  
to see and to appropriate all.

Not with the eyes alone, or with the senses alone, but with the  
intelligence of the mind.

And to know everything so as to be entirely known.

This burning desire to know which Claudel has always felt and which is so pathetically expressed in his face by the powerful jaws capable of chewing and of savoring the substance of the universe, this voracious desire is in him the sign and the effective means of God's will that everything should belong to Him and return to Him in joy and humility.

Claudel's lyricism entails an attention to nature, an illumination of the entire creation, a poetic revelation of temporal things, which is an entirely new phenomenon in Christianity, and which corresponds exactly, in its order, to what Maritain has so deeply analyzed under the name of the sanctification of the profane.

**"TO KNOW EVERYTHING** in order to be entirely known."

I would like to try to explain now Claudel's theory of knowledge which is implied in that formula. I shall begin by philosophical explanations of a general nature.

"The nature of the soul," says Aristotle, "is to be all." Not all by a pantheistic extension which would fuse all the essences in the identity of the mind; but, without substantial alteration, in becoming all things through knowledge, because knowledge is a new way of being. Within the transparent waters of the mind a new essence emerges, and little by little it is the entire universe which takes up its abode in the inner recesses of thought, and there unfolds its full measures. Knowledge is thus an activity of a very special nature which consists not in doing, but in becoming, and in being other things and all things. The human soul is capable of knowing all things; in that sense it is completely in potency, as God is completely pure act. The natural destiny of the mind is then the greatest possible realization of this power, to become all by knowledge. This is the most fundamental tendency of the soul. And

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the soul, in fact, will know herself in her full measure only when she has exercised all her cognitive potentialities, when she will have extended herself to the dimensions of the universe, "to know everything in order to be completely known."

But we are concerned so far, only with a speculative knowledge and not with a poetic knowledge so called. As its name indicates, this is a knowledge which consists not in being or in becoming the object intentionally, but in making the object, according to the admirable word of John of Saint Thomas discovered by Maritain: "One knows a thing when one is capable of making it." Evidently the poet cannot again create the world, and he does not possess the creative, almighty power of God. But just as speculative judgment ends in the intentional existence of the object, practical knowledge ends in a concrete existence, that of the work of art, which in its own order, is sufficient unto itself, becoming a center of suggestions, of incantations, of unfailing attraction. The universe expressed by the poet is detached from the real universe; it duplicates it, and since it is more simple, with smaller dimensions and more landmarks, it is more accessible to us than the real universe which it helps us to understand better.

"Have you noticed," said Oscar Wilde, "how for some time now landscape paintings have begun to resemble those of Corot?" That is because the artist has accustomed us to know things as he knows them, that is to say to reveal the existential secret of their beauty. One is absorbed in their beauty without any thought of doing anything else with it, except to enjoy the fact that they are created, that they are, and that they are good. As if we ourselves were making them such.

"When in a vapid mood," says Claudel, "we employ things for their utility, forgetting how pure they are in their very existence; but when, after a long work, pushing through the brush and the brambles, at noon, I penetrate historically into the heart of the clearing and I put my hand on the burning surface of the heavy rock, the enormity of my discovery is comparable only to the entrance of Alexander in Jerusalem." (*Connaissance de l'Est.*)

"The object of poetry," Claudel says again, "is not, as it is often said, dreams and illusions, or ideas. It is that holy reality, given once and for all, at the center of which we stand . . . It is all that looks at us and at which we look. There is a *poesis perennis* which does not invent its themes, but which eternally returns to those provided by Creation, just as does our liturgy, of which one does not tire any more than of the spectacle of the changing seasons. The aim of poetry is not, as Baudelaire said, to plunge into the depths of the infinite to discover there something new, but into the depths of the definite to find there the inexhaustible." (*Positions et propositions, I.*)

The formula which I cited "to know everything in order to be entirely

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known" should be thus clarified, and we should say of the poet that he must create everything in order to realize himself completely. To create everything, according to Claudel's own expressions, by imitation, and analogy.

"By means of words, as the painter by the means of colors and the musician by that of sounds, we wish to constitute, from a scene, or an emotion, or even an abstract idea, a kind of equivalent or of species soluble in the mind."

*(Positions et propositions, I.)*

But what Claudel calls knowledge (*Co-Naissance*) extends much farther than conscious artistic activity. *Co-Naître* is to be born of a new birth to oneself, and to the world. God creates the thing, and of its own weight that thing inserts itself immediately in the universal harmony; each new thing is a new presence to the universe and the entire universe is present to it. There is a universal solidarity by which the whole is in each thing and each thing is in the whole. The very fact that two things oppose each other allows one to define them one by the other and therefore reveals the need they have of each other to continue and to assume, each, its own purpose and efficacy. What is unfinished suggests completion, and what suffers creates the nostalgia of what is perfect, and that which passes prefigures what is eternal. This is the metaphysical foundation of Claudelian symbolism, and here is why, in the very center of Claudel's works stands *Dona Musica*, who is the incarnation of his symbolism and whose name expresses so well what Claudel expected from such a character. *Dona Musica* prayed thus:

O God, You have given me that power that all those who look at me experience the desire to sing; just as if I were to give them the beat in a low voice.

**T**HE KIND of ode typical of Claudel, with the praise of music and of the sea, would perhaps explain more than his poetic works, also his diplomatic career; since the sea is the image of the universal will of God and music is the effect of love, according to the words of St. Augustine, *amans est cantare*. When Camille says to Rodrigue, "Love is sufficient unto itself," Rodrigue answers, "And I, I think that nothing is sufficient unto love. Ah! I discovered something admirable. It is love which is to give me the keys of the world and not withdraw them from me."

It is love indeed which gives to Rodrigue the keys of the world, for one must have a soul deeply stirred and shaken by desire to undertake without the slightest concern all the works of conquest that Rodrigue undertakes. But it is love also which finally takes away from him the keys of the world, because it is of no avail for man to win the universe if he should happen to lose his soul. And the soul is created after all, for God, not for the things of this world. As the poet gives the things to God, particularly the most beautiful

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things, they are like divine baits to awaken the soul to love. For it is our joy which we love even throughout our sufferings, and complete joy is found only in God. God plays with the seductive things of the world, with our sorrows and our joys in this world, with our earthly loves, to bind us to our love for Him, our imperfect and humiliated love.

Don Rodrigue loves Dona Prouheze and, if he could win her, he would forget the entire world and God and his very soul for her, so beautiful she is. But the wide ocean separates them and, because he does not possess what he loves, he scorns what he possesses, the America which he has conquered. He has become poor in spirit through his love for Prouheze, and the sea between them is like the will of God which keeps them apart, nevertheless united in the acceptance of this providential separation. In accepting that separation Rodrigue becomes poor by the loss of Prouheze, for such a deep love could be satisfied in God alone. Looking at the sea and the stars, Rodrigue realizes full well that he can no longer draw away from them. He is caught, so to speak, in their harmony, attuned to everything which is in eternal accordance with the will of God; and his freedom also is immortal.

Claudel has put on the title page of *Soulier de Satin*, a Portuguese proverb, a sentence of St. Augustine saying that even sins concur to the salvation of the predestined. But here again we are struck by the difference between the connotations of the words of St. Augustine and the echo of the same words in Claudel. The head of a spiritual city, Augustine is charged to lead people to eternal life by detaching them from the blandishments of this world. If God has permitted that he should take delight in the pleasures of the earth, such an experience has brought forth the *Confessions*, a book of an entrancing theological lyricism, which will always inspire in sinners repentance for their sins and hatred for the offense perpetrated against God. In the upheaval of an empire falling apart, we hear that cry, like the cry of a man of the watch, splendidly pure and solitary; and all the medieval doctors will listen to that voice with utter delight.

In the dawn of a new epoch, God takes for himself the life of a man who is the ambassador of a temporal city; he has the mission to bring concord among people and to make their earthly condition acceptable to them. He too has known the forbidden delights which the creature can give without God. From such an experience was born *Le Soulier de Satin*, an impersonal drama in which lyricism borrows the voices of the entire earth in order to ascend to God. Now, if we want to return to God, we have the concert of these thousand voices of Claudel's drama to guide us, the memory of that Fourth Day of the *Soulier de Satin*, of those conversations mingling with the noise of the waves on the sea, diversely carried and stirred by the supreme will of God.

(Continued on page 207)

# Review-Articles

## Paul Claudel, the Apocalypse, and Israel

*Paul Claudel interroge l'Apocalypse.* By Paul Claudel. Paris: Gallimard.

WITHOUT ironical intentions, one can say that this voluminous commentary on the Apocalypse constitutes a Revelation of the world of the poet, as well as of the destiny of the universe. It initiates us to the feeling, the thinking and the poetic practice of Paul Claudel. Earlier statements of the poet on his sacred function would justify this equation between private and cosmic becoming. He wrote in *La Muse qui est la Grâce*:

C'est le monde entier que tu me demandes! . . . quand tu m'appelles, ce n'est pas avec moi seulement qu'il faut répondre, mais avec tous les êtres qui m'entourent,

Un poème tout entier comme un seul mot tel qu'une cité dans son enceinte pareille au rond de la bouche.

. . . Est-ce qu'il me faut engendrer le monde et le faire sortir de mes entrailles? O œuvre de moi-même dans la douleur! ô œuvre de ce monde à te représenter.

In a passage from *La Ville* he compares the task of the poet to the double movement through which human society "absorbs the Principle and restitutes its image." Claudel's interpretation of the Apocalypse, then, rests on the same foundations as his own poetry. He tells us in *Feuilles de Saints* that the poem he feels impelled to write travels on a triple road:

La première en haut est celle des Saints au-dessus de nous, reprenant, recomposant chacun de nos mouvements en une offrande solennelle, leur procession au-dessus de notre histoire.

La seconde est le poème lui-même comme un torrent de mots, comme une grande rue moderne toute remplie d'une masse de peuple qui marche dans le même sens, chacun libre entre ses voisins.

La troisième de l'autre côté du papier est ce grand fleuve la nuit qu'on ne voit pas. (*La Muraille intérieure de Tokio*)

This Dantesque conception applies also to his interrogation of Scripture. Claudel rejects any exegesis of the Apocalypse which would reduce it to an allegory, to an impenetrable riddle, or to a linear and simple historical pattern. Every episode of prophecy is linked to the unchanging Word from which all time originates, in the eye of which "il n'y a plus de temps," even while we, the human actors of the sacred drama, are still involved in its unfolding. For this reason, each section of the prophetic book must be considered as valid for many historical events. When viewed as a development, the book is to be understood as a revelation of typical situations which engender one another through an inner determinism; they may be re-enacted many times throughout the span of human evolution, and can never be confined, as most former commentators thought, to a single period, state, city, ruler or incident. The Apocalypse, as understood by Claudel, is not the model of a puzzle, merely to be pieced together once and for all. Rather, it appears as the expression in symbolic speech of the law of destiny which,

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in an unlimited number of occurrences, will assert itself through mankind to shape its concrete duration. Past, present and future are put on equal level of actuality by the prophetic voice speaking in the name of "the One who was, who is being, and who will be." There is a continuous relationship in the Apocalypse between that which passes and that which does not pass, "un engrenage continual du temps à l'éternité." God sees all things in the same instant, "he never stops thinking them, each one according to its part and mode." Thus all events are considered as the bearers or manifestations of the eternal will. The pages of the Book of Revelations always refer to several planes of existence, and Claudel's mission is to make the relationship between these spheres evident. He witnesses "une espèce d'activité réciproque par laquelle l'Éternité ingère, enregistre, solidifie, authentifie les événements, et les évènements de leur côté, ils réalisent dans la durée et dans l'espace, ils explicitent les desseins de l'éternité. Ils transforment ce qui passe en une chose qui n'est plus capable de passer, en une page où de fait il n'y a plus de temps et où tout s'agège en simultanéité comme un tableau fixe qu'on envisage d'un seul coup."

The modality by which the divine will is made apparent in things and history Claudel calls "intussusception," the very process which he characterized as poetic in his earlier writings. "God does not feed only on the smoke of incense and holocausts, but on the sacred exhalation of all that which exists. Like Isaac bent over Jacob, he breathes into himself his people Israel . . . and in return delivers (to man) his most essential intimacy . . . It is this breath, the generator of life and speech, which he asks back from us in each act of respiration to the utmost of our capacity." This Claudelian principle must be placed in the context of his other works to take its full significance in the whole pattern of the poet's thought. We read for instance in *L'Esprit et l'Eau*:

Ainsi entre les voix humaines quelle est celle-ci qui n'est ni plus basse ni plus haute?

Pourquoi donc seul l'entends-tu? Parce que seule soumise à une mesure divine!

Parce qu'elle n'est tout entière que mesure même,

La mesure sainte, libre, toute-puissante, créatrice!

Ah, je le sens, l'esprit ne cesse point d'être porté sur les eaux!

And again, in *La Ville*, Coeuvre, the poet's mouthpiece, tells us about the Claudelian verse-form:

O mon fils! lorsque j'étais un poète entre les hommes

J'inventai ce vers qui n'avait ni rime ni mètre,

Et je le définissais dans le secret de mon cœur comme cette fonction double et réciproque

Par laquelle l'homme absorbe la vie, et restitue dans l'acte suprême de l'expiration

Une parole intelligible.

There can be little doubt that Claudel conceived his own activity as poet in the way he describes the operation of the divine spirit through human history, and that his interrogation of the Apocalypse signifies at the same time a scrutinizing of his creative powers. What indeed strikes me most, as an unprejudiced reader of both Holy Writ and Claudel, is the latter's profound, and as it were, *natural*

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comprehension of the imaginative material through which the sacred writers—from Isaiah to St. John—make their meaning manifest. In a magnificent passage of “*L’arbre de vie*” the poet lifts himself into the vegetal being of the foliage: “Comme je me comprends feuille! . . . La feuille, qui est la contemplation divine, absorbe le temps et le transforme en immortalité . . . Toute une ère debout dont le feuillage à grand panache dans l’azur célèbre le jubilé! . . . La voilà, cette feuille de l’Arbre de vie qui nous a guéris de la mort. Nous avons réussi à faire du durable avec ce qui passe.” This is much less an exegesis of interrelated texts of the Bible than a justification of the ways of human poetic imagination, by an “*explication raisonnée*” of its operations in the central body of Judaeo-Christian literature, on which Western sensibility is patterned.

With typical Claudelian fury and heaviness of wit, the book makes fun of those literal-minded, “textual-criticism” types of Johannite scholars, who, being unable to recreate in their narrowness the vision of the Evangelist, reduce it to some mechanical puppet-show of their own invention. Thus Claudel launches an attack against père Allô’s rather naïve transcription of the vision of a New Jerusalem: “Qu’en dites-vous maintenant, monsieur mon Révérend Père Allô, de votre petit fleuve en tire-bouchon qui réjouit de toutes espèces de divertissements hydrauliques ce cornichon de trois mille kilomètres de haut que saint Jean selon vous aurait attribué pour résidence aux Elus et qui descend aimablement vers eux ‘comme une fiancée’? Non pas ciel, mais gratte-ciel, et l’on ne sait même pas si l’on aurait pas prévu des ascenseurs, quoique l’eau courante soit assurée à tous les étages, non moins que l’éclairage gratuit.” Elsewhere he ironizes like a schoolboy against learned, historical-minded interpreters, remarking about the obscene, pun-like consonance of an alien word: “Ziqqurat! quel mot agréable dans la bouche d’un savant.” Against intellectual or spiritual gadgetry Claudel piles up all his wrath. One feels that not only the Christian believer, but also, and perhaps more so, the genuine and creative-conscious poet is offended by these sacrilegious tricks, played by unsuspecting pedants or bunglers at the expense of divine (or human) inspiration. Because of this slightly impure motivation, the denunciations of Claudel are lacking in humility. They betray the protest of the misunderstood poetic genius as much as the pious scandalization of a selfless and meek worshipper.

Not only does Claudel marvellously grasp and communicate the substance of Biblical imagery in its immediate, concrete intentions (for instance, the sexual allusion in the pomegranate whose germination delights the Spouse in the Song of Songs: “cet amas de larmes d’un rouge translucide, dont chacune est une semence, théaurisées, agglomérées *comme au fond d’une bourse . . .*”)—he often adds to it, as the stone struck by lightning answers with its own sparks to the fire of heaven. Here, then, we have first-hand evidence of the interrelation between human and divine inspiration, which our preceding remarks pointed out as focal in Claudel’s mentality. There sometimes seems to occur, between the divine Master and his earthly servant-knight, a momentary confusion of identity. The Faustian hero Tête d’Or survives under the cloak of the dedicated artist Pierre de Craon, the cathedral builder, in whose creations the old Promethean fires are still smoldering. Thus Pierre speaks in *L’Annonce faite à Marie*:

Puissé-je bientôt sous moi sentir s’élèver mon vaste ouvrage, poser la main sur cette chose indestructible que j’ai faite et qui tient ensemble dans

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toutes ses parties, cette œuvre bien fermée que j'ai construite de pierre forte afin que de principe y commence, mon œuvre que Dieu habite!

These words do not come from a contrite, self-renouncing heart. Thus Claudel, beneath the appearances of primitive Christian self-surrender, belongs much more to our times than some critics would like us to believe. Egocentricity constitutes for him, as well as for the straight Romantic and Nietzschean nihilistic descendants, a major stumbling block. What saves Claudel from the dead end of sterile autolatry is his enrollment under the banner of Christ. He is the Catholic Church's number-one enlisted man. One cannot help thinking of him as a kind of condottiere of God, who deals freely, and on equal terms, with his chosen *patron*. He fights the Lord's battles, negotiates on his behalf with believers and unbelievers alike, and serves as a self-appointed mouthpiece of the Word whenever circumstances require his intervention. Thus, when Paul Claudel adds to the description of the divine face, which is likened to snow by Scripture, that it consists of "de la foudre modelée," he not only renders the spirit of such a passage accurately but creates it anew, in a way surpassing the original simile through the extraordinary invention of his visionary mind. For this reason, at least, the difficult and sometimes cumbersome reading of such a book, notwithstanding its religious and spiritual import, remains rewarding and fruitful, in spite of Claudel's heavy-handed ironies, his self-righteousness or arrogance in spiritual things, and his unpleasantly reactionary views in matters political or social.

As for the over-all meaning the poet gives to the Book of Revelations, once the unbiased reader has progressed beyond the obvious surface of Catholic apologetics, it becomes harder to see clearly Claudel's intentions, which this writer finds contradictory in the crucial issues. As far as the Christian Church is concerned, the prophecy of St. John is contained, says Claudel, in the preliminary Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia. He considers these epistles as descriptive of seven main periods or phases of Roman Catholicism in its relationship to the civilization of the West. As the poet notes, the temporal vision of the Apocalypse is pivoted upon the "return of the Jews," to which the Letter to the Church of Philadelphia apparently alludes. "S'il y a un fait d'une suprême importance, et en même temps précis, certain, proposé par Saint Paul, comme condition indispensable de la fin et de la conclusion des temps, c'est bien celui-là. Comment admettre que l'Apocalypse, qui est las révélation de ces choses *qui doivent être*, puisse n'en faire aucune mention, si on refuse de l'adapter à cette place même?" Together with his magnificent commentary on "Le Fleuve" and "L'Arbre de Vie," Claudel's chapter on "Philadelphie" is the most impressive in the book, and probably one of the greatest fragments of modern religious inspiration. The theme of the destiny of Israel is the dominant one; all else gravitates around it, as it does indeed in the Scriptural texts themselves. Often, in the preceding chapters, Claudel, following a well-known patristic usage, metaphorically designated the Christian church as "Israel." But now he speaks of the historical Israel, that, as he reminds us, fought alone with the angel at the Jabok River, vanquished night and time—the persecution of nearly two thousand years—and in our own generation reasserted its temporal identity as a separate nation.

This Israel, whose function it has been "not only to know death, but to live on it, to live it," that "willy nilly, in the midst of That which is not, is the sworn agent of That which is," therefore brings with it "the impossibility of taking the

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idols seriously." Now Israel reclaims its crown of sacred leadership: "You have enjoyed my inheritance at my expense long enough, and it is the Eldest Son who, in your stead, has succeeded you in exile and slavery." At this point Claudel appears to interpret, on the one hand, the text of the Apocalypse as a prophecy of the plain and simple merger of Israel and Christianity, the converted Jewish soul being "twice Christian," as Marcel Jouhandeau put it in an article on Max Jacob. "Une certaine construction extérieure est réalisée, qui ne laisse plus de choix à cet affirmateur d'El que l'émigration en masse du côté de la Cité intérieure." On the other hand, this "emigration" is not described by Claudel as a conversion at all—a turning to something *else*—but rather as a restoration of Israel to the consciousness of its own reality, of its kinship with the Messiah, in a kind of self-reconciliation through which an open-eyed Israel ("Israël dessillé") reaffirms its spiritual lordship over the straying Gentiles: "But you too, Christians, you more or less well baptised ones, you better begin to realize what I am bringing to you, this origin which, at the end of times, has begun its march to your encounter." In the midst of a world constantly reverting to paganism, in spite of its veneer of Christianity, "a witness was needed through the centuries, to testify about the basic and irreducible incompatibility between the human soul and any thing but God. But, *eripiam eum et glorificabo eum!* Nothing is more certain, Israel has a promise in its pocket, more endurable than the firmament. Not only salvation, but glory as well." Claudel tells us further that "to all those who are suffering on earth, not only of physical but also of moral illness, . . . *qui sunt in paenis tenebrarum*, God has left as a pledge His son Israel."

Will Israel, the "merchant of promises" among nations, agree to disappear in this reconciliation? "Is he going to lose himself in the mass? Will your Eldest Son alienate himself so much from his own face that even You will not recognize him any more? Have you not entrusted to him, separate and distinct, till the end of the world, a function which is his alone? This inflexible power of refusal which he has nourished and cultivated outside the Church, and against her, is there nothing in it capable of service?" From this rhetorical question, Claudel is carried to a conception of a distinct Israel, allied with Christianity, and assuming in the newly reconciled Judaeo-Christian complex the part of the Machabees or the Zealots, against the ever-recurring impulse towards paganism which afflicts other nations. In such a bold perspective of the future, the "key of David" goes back from the slackening Gentile mass, whose zeal for God is seen as uncertain and vacillating, to Israel, the faithful and permanent spearhead of the divine Oneness in the world. "Israel has come in again, he has taken back his seat at the paternal hearth, the ring has been put back on his finger, he has recovered his place and his right as the Eldest Son . . . He has resumed his position as witness, not any more with respect to the future, but, in the name of the whole Old Testament which is resurrected in him, a complete assemblage of flesh and muscles grown over his dry bones, a husk which suddenly has been filled, and, *vita ex mortuis*, this ghost all at once who has recovered saliva and speech. . ." Quoting a passage from Isaiah, "I have given him as a witness to the people, as a leader and teacher to the nations," and the line from the Apocalypse, "Thou shalt be a column in the temple of my God," Claudel further defines this new actualization of historic Israel: "Now he puts himself into correspondence with the eternal in the present." The characteristics of this new age, of this new

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Jerusalem, in the temple of which a new divine Name will be inscribed on the central column Israel, are summed up for Claudel in the word "Philadelphia," which means in Greek "the city of fraternal love."

Under the aegis of a restored Israel, the world will know a new kind of relationship between human beings. In the concrete surroundings of daily life, and not only in the traditional Christian hereafter, will then emerge "a social situation based on the practical realisation of a reciprocal affection in which we are brothers—and how shall we be brothers if not in the acknowledgement of the same father? . . . I will acquire a new sense, which I will call the gift of social sensibility . . . The waters of Charity and of Justice shall spring to the extremities of the City." Social and human liberation *hic et nunc* will then be the new element brought in by a reawakened Israel at this sixth phase of history, "This newness which results from a permanent contact with the origin."

As one can see from this exposition of Claudel's views on the destiny of Israel, and of its autonomous function within the Christian universe in the Philadelphian era, he departs radically from what is usually surmised about the future of the Jews in Catholic orthodoxy. Claudel's interpretation of the Letter to the Church of Philadelphia, written around the Fall of 1941, confirmed by later declaration concerning the higher significance of the re-establishment of the State of Israel, which were published recently by the French press, is, to say the least, daring and revolutionary, in the framework of age-old Catholic expectations, and unsuccessful mass-proselytizing of the Jews. Claudel, of course, was well aware of this. Therefore, at the end of his monumental, fifty-five page exposition of the Letter to the Church of Philadelphia, he adds a twenty-line footnote commenting once again on the proper identity of the Victor mentioned in the last paragraph of this Apocalyptic Letter. For Claudel, this Victor is the reconciled, open-eyed Israel, as previously qualified. But then, as if seized by an afterthought, he adds blandly: "Nothing prevents us from applying this title to the Sovereign Pontiff, as the Victor *par excellence*, against whom the Fiend *par excellence* cannot be made to prevail, an answer previously suggested. According to that view, Peter does not cease to be the column of the Church, I mean, its spinal column . . ."

It is clear that these two interpretations of "the Victor" are not complementary, but contradictory. In the first, Israel again becomes the "pillar" in the temple of the new Jerusalem; in the second the apostle Peter remains the "column" of the Philadelphian world-community. As the Sovereign Pontiff of the Roman Church can hardly be assimilated to the historical, exilic Jewry, except in terms of a conversion of the Gentile world to the renewed spiritual leadership of resurrected Israel, we must conclude from this dilemma that Claudel proposes two alternatives to which he commits himself simultaneously (with a preference for the first), although they are mutually exclusive by the consent of the poet himself in terms of the present structure of Catholic society. This indecision reveals hesitation as to the ultimate significance of both Jewish and Christian history, a double attraction into directions which do not appear identical, in the eyes of either contemporary Israel or the Roman Curia, in this century at least. Claudel speaks here the language of an illuminated Nazarean Zionist, who sometimes slightly mixes up his proper names, and comes out with Rome instead of Jerusalem. It is also the idiom of a clever Champagne peasant who boldly involves himself both ways. What better means are there of having salvation,—of announcing its procedure, too,—than to expect it at once through the channel of a

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restored but autonomous Israel, and through the channel of the Roman Catholic hierarchy? In this eschatological ruse, which reminds us of Jacob deceitfully obtaining his old father's blessing, the reckless, primitive, uncouth strength of Claudel's character, and his radical belief in a redemptive future become manifest. The Book of Revelation not only discloses to him the fate of heaven and earth, but somehow, by hook or by crook, the poet manages to feed with it his own cunning hope. Great blessings came out of Jacob's longing, and his many fervent tricks. Claudel has heeded the indelible words Balaam spoke to the heathen king, when he saw the tents of Israel camping in the wilderness, on the edge of the promised Land:

Blessed be every one that blesseth thee,  
And cursed be everyone that curseth thee. (Numb., 24.)

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CLAUDE VIGEE

### Approaches to Claudel

*Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud Jean-Louis Barrault.* "Connaissance de Paul Claudel." Troisième année, douzième cahier. René Julliard. 1955.

*La Foi dans l'œuvre de Paul Claudel.* By Jacques Andrieu. Presses Universitaires de France. 1955.

THE FIRST of these titles, another in the series of "notebooks" brought out by the celebrated Madeleine Renaud Jean-Louis Barrault company, is dedicated to the memory of Paul Claudel who died in 1955 at the close of a career which saw him rise from obscurity to acclaim. His creative career came to an end in the thirties, and we have had a generation to place his works in perspective. During that time, as well as before, he was both adulated and anathematized as writer and even as Christian. The state funeral accorded Claudel, the outpouring of eulogies, were the opening of what will undoubtedly be an increasing series of homages, appreciations and studies that will take a keener look at his voluminous work. "Cahiers" of this sort have the advantage of sincerity and enthusiasm, however momentary, but they are also imperiled by their superficial approach. It is too bad that Barrault has allowed the exigencies of time and occasion to force the publication of a piece that properly had its place only in March, specifically the third and twenty-fourth of March, 1955, when several distinguished interpreters of Claudel gathered at the Théâtre Marigny to pay him homage immediately after his death and to present readings from his works.

Though Barrault has been a moving spirit in the staging of Claudel's plays, recreating them with sensitivity, his writings leave much to be desired in the calm appraisal of the fundamental character of Claudelian lyric and dramatic poetry. The lead article, taking up some three-quarters of the *Cahier*, may have breathed the same dedication that one can read in the older *Cahier*, "Paul Claudel et Christophe Colomb," where Barrault stated directly his enthusiasm for the master's spirit. Here, the opening lines of the eulogy sound, hélas, like a parody of the very man he sought to honor. "Pendant plus de

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quinze ans, nous nous sommes obstinés sur lui, les dents plantées dans son cou de taureau." This is a caricature of the Tardenois peasant attacking the citadel of God, this is a parroting of the words of the man Gide likened to the "marteau pilon." Barrault adopts the vigorous images of Claudel, even his puns: "Nous essayerons de le faire renaître, et du même coup nous naîtrons avec lui." But he fails to impose on the reader the startling leap from a formless *métaphysique* to a dynamic *poétique* that Claudel forces on even unsympathetic readers of *Art poétique* and *Connaissance de l'Est*.

Barrault proceeds to establish some Claudelian traits: Claudel's attention to detail; his rapt seizure of the range of existence, "l'immense octave de la création;" his passionate contemplation of the real, beginning with matter and rising through the material to the source of all being; his conception of poetry as the visible, the "défini," the knowledge of all things recreated through the poet's *verbe* to the uncreated—all illustrated by readings from *Partage de midi*, from *Tête d'Or*, by poems from *Corona benignitatis anni Dei*, and finally from the synthesis (in theory, if not in reality) of *Le Soulier de satin*. Barrault's remarks are the thread on which these readings are strung. He brings them to the theatre, which was for Claudel the arena of "un homme de désir." He shows the manifestations of Claudel in the diverse characters he created: the man of frustrated desire, half-Prometheus, half a prefigure of the Redeemer; the Rimbaud of *Tête d'Or*; the mute and rejected egoist Mesa of *Partage de midi*; and the women, Violaine and Mara, Lalâ and Lechy Elbernon and finally Prouhèze, who are vehicles of grace or of temptation. Barrault closes with selections from *Le Soulier de satin* with its many roads all leading to the same one God. The Sacrificial words of Père Jésuite lead to the close of the play, "Délivrance aux âmes captives!" This could well be Claudel's epitaph.

That a faithful collaborator of Claudel has the right to express his admiration for the artist is indisputable. That Barrault has done so in a legitimate way is indubitable. But one may justifiably question whether the printing of this programme will advance the goal indicated by the title, with its inevitable allusion to the famous play on words, or arouse interest where ignorance prevails. The reader unacquainted with Claudel will first be repelled by the preciousness of the opening, by the distorted echo of Claudelian images, and then by the elusive references to works he does not know. More serious, however, the reader who does know Claudel will find that the whole article smacks of the *déjà vu* without contributing new understanding. The informed reader who does not share Barrault's enthusiasm will consider this far from entertaining.

The other articles include a speech delivered by Barrault at Edinburgh in which he justifies the seeming absurdity of giving *Hamlet* in French at the Edinburgh Festival. Here too the tone of an after-dinner speech to sympathetic hearers loses its original charm in the printing. Far more provocative within its limitations is an article by George Lerminier on "Jacques Copeau et l'art du comédien," in which the age-old paradox treated by Diderot is mentioned in relation to Copeau's theories, his practice and his counsel. The fear of "possession" of an actor by his role that haunted Brecht and the conviction of Copeau that such "possession" leads through a succession of masques to the full possession of humanity and not to damnation are contrasted with references to their writings. The article is far from exhaustive, but suggests tantalizing

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contradictions. One might well wish that Barrault, as a critical interpreter, rather than pretending to be a critic, had merely reserved for the *Cahier a compte rendu* of his homage and had dedicated his energies to an essay on the problems that arise out of staging Claudel. The *Cahier*, then, is on the whole disappointing.

The deeper exegesis of Claudel's work is better left to Jacques Andrieu's *La Foi dans l'œuvre de Paul Claudel*. While not pretentious, its scope is broad. It may at first seem odd that, though everyone knows from experience or hearsay that Claudel's Catholic faith was fundamental, no one has yet undertaken an analysis of his faith in his work. One is tempted to say once more that such an obvious title leads one to suspect the *déjà entendu*. Jacques Rivière's *Etudes*, Jacques Madaule's two lengthy works, Pierre Angers' *Commentaire sur l'Art poétique*, Duhamel's essay on Claudel as a "philosophe," all readily accessible books, presume in some way Claudel's faith as their point of departure. Other works, lesser known, such as Du Sarament's *Paul Claudel et la liturgie*, explore a particular phase of Claudel's integration of his faith with his art. But none, to my knowledge, has sought specifically to come to grips with the problem of that integration in his work. It is not that other writers, perhaps more pervasive in their point of view or more explicit in their treatment of Claudel as an artist, have failed to clarify the deep-seated necessity of his faith to his work, but they have simply rooted their discussion more in its literary, let us say esthetic, nature.

While the author is careful to point out that he is not attempting a psychological biography, he is forced to begin with a rapid survey of those soul-shaking events that transpired in the summer of 1886 and then at Christmas. Claudel first discovered Rimbaud and the existence of what he called the world of the supernatural. Then at Christmas a sudden, total and irrefragable conversion changed his life. Andrieu proceeds to discuss the problematic nature of the "supernatural" that Claudel categorically states Rimbaud opened for him. On the one hand we have the intimate conviction of Claudel, his oft-repeated testimony that Rimbaud, "mystique à l'état sauvage," tore away the veil of material barriers in a mechanistic world; on the other, painstaking efforts like those of René Etiemble prove that by no fantastic straining of the imagination could Rimbaud be said to be a Christian writer, even in the negative sense, and by no forcing of religio-literary analysis could he have a "Christian" influence. There is no dilemma, for despite scholarly accuracy, the fact remains that Claudel was so affected. It is true that this veil might have remained but half-torn, or reclosed later, without his mysterious experience in Notre-Dame. The more real world of the symbol might have remained largely a sublimated vision of material reality, divorced from matter but not yet attached to another spiritual and positive reality; in short, Claudel might have embraced a poetic reality in the manner of Mallarmé, who did teach him, as he acknowledges (and Andrieu neglects this), to question all things by asking "Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire?"

Quite logically, and in the tradition of most Claudelian critics, Andrieu undertakes a division of Claudel's works paralleling his life. He begins with the acid years between 1886-1890 (when he formally re-entered the Church after four years of rebellion) and 1900-1906, that is, the adjustment of Claudel's life to an all-demanding spiritual reality, his frustrated anxiety that he might

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better leave the world for the cloister. The whole period was summed up and terminated in the personal crisis of an impossible love affair movingly transcribed into *Partage de midi* which, with its Jansenist overtones, ends the conflict and opens the curtain on the new era of "la certitude assise." The most valuable point in this section, divided into two parts, "La foi, adhésion passionnée," and that of faith in a "certitude assise," is that Andrieu makes the distinction between the subjective faith and the transcendental reality of God's existence and of a Church which is the union of men to God. Andrieu systematically indicates the elements that are constant in Claudel's work, though unsystematic—the irrefutable drive of an adherence, interior and subjective, prey to the doubts of the mystic's dark night of the soul; the extraordinary and heavily materialistic love of this world's beauty; the influence of readings in philosophy and of Claudel's travels in Asia. Andrieu takes us through the Rimbalduen epoch of *Tête d'Or*, the Taoistic negative concept of transcendental reality seen in *La Ville*, to the development in germ of *Art poétique*'s vision of creation as the deprivation of God and the irresistible drive back to creation's origins. Andrieu fails to mention, however, that while *Tête d'Or* and *La Ville* were in gestation, while the poems of *Vers d'exil* were being written, Claudel had already begun the pastorale of *La Jeune Fille Violaine*, at first lyrical and amorphous, but destined to develop into the strength of *L'Annonce faite à Marie*. It would have been a valuable point insofar as it proves Andrieu's own thesis that, beneath the demands of an emanent reality, an immanent evolution of statement was going on to fortify and exteriorize an inalterable conviction.

Andrieu's discussion of the eventual reconciliation between art and the vocation of any Christian to the perfect life is most satisfactory, for he does not, like many critics, gloss over the genuine concern of a soul which, athirst for perfection, yet finds itself still in and of this world, and which moreover never falters in its native passion to possess it. As we know by hindsight, this passion became elevated to the possession of the world for God, as it was allegorically stated in *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb*. The thirst of the poet for the world became the obverse of what Père Carré calls "La vocation de l'autre monde," the hungering for the ultimate banks of existence. Andrieu has the real virtue of taking Claudel as he was (the book was written two and three years before Claudel's death). He does not hesitate to show the synthesis within Claudel of subjective tendencies, an objective faith, and outside influences that were in reality foreign to his temperament. Thus Andrieu justly shows that much in Claudel is basically Augustinian in essence, but that it is overlaid with Thomistic expression. Claudel is closer to Pascal's "Certitude. Certitude. Joie." than even he admitted. But he imposed on himself the ratiocinative processes, transforming his sensuous and intuitive grasp into a more systematized ideal of *action*.

Having established the character of Claudel's total adhesion, Andrieu goes on to apply Saint Paul's words, "In God we live, we move and we are," to Claudel's innermost dialectic with reality. Claudel devoted himself to the mission of recreating the world the better to seek out its origins, the better to become God, or rather to become *in* God, and the better to reduce time and space to the suppositive realities they are. Beyond the vocational aspect of such a desire or aspiration, Claudel posited too the sacrificial nature of the poet who, recreating existence, offers it to God (*l'offrande*). The evangelisation, restor-

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ation and sacrifice of all reality to its Creator includes man. Thus, the artist and the Christian in Claudel cannot be divorced. The thorny problem of Claudel-artist versus Claudel-Christian was no paradox to Claudel at all. He could with equal ease declare to Jammes, Frizeau and Gide that all his work sought only to show men the truth, and then say that all he sought was to satisfy himself in expressing his own yearnings, as he did to Jean Amrouche in a series of radio interviews published as *Mémoires improvisés*. As he had said long ago to Gide, to whose *Journal* we owe the observation, to the Abbé Bremond and in a letter to Suarès, the poet-artist and the Christian saint are perpendicular within himself, just as poetry and prayer are parallels, the second going directly to God, the first addressed to God and to men. The chapter on faith, art and the world lacks the cogency of previous chapters, but it is clarified by the last chapter which deals with the triple aspect of his faith in love, sacrifice and joy. There Andrieu shows more distinctly the relationship between love for God and the acceptance of defeat by God in sacrifice. Hence Claudel created a Christian idea of tragedy in which man must succumb or be lost; sacrifice is the basic theme throughout his drama. Joy is the necessary concomitant of love and conscious sacrifice through which man finds himself.

Though Andrieu disavows any effort to give the impression that Claudel was perfectly consonant with himself and claims rather to indicate the general lines of development within Claudel's evolution, it is clear that Claudel never changed substantially. He developed and varied his expression, but everything turned on the one fundamental fact of his conversion, even when he was still wrestling with the abandonment of his art for the sake of living his faith. The sole and total vocation of Claudel as a poet was to live his conviction in his work. The final mission of his art was to make the nature of reality and divinely-created beauty clear to all men through their delight. Thus his faith breathes in his art, *through* his art. Again, while Andrieu rejects the idea of any attempt to frame Claudel's faith (in his works) within doctrinal orthodoxy, he is at times overly-careful to point out that Claudel's expression is not in direct opposition to dogma or out of line with acceptable historical tendencies. He does away with any suspicion of pantheism in Claudel's affirmation that God too is "parmi les choses naturelles." To explain away essential pantheistic tendencies or convictions in Claudel is to do battle with the basically non-existent, and to circumscribe poetic expression with caveats is to apply too rigorous critical criteria that are more suitable to patristic interpretation.

The reader is hindered in this book by two faults. The first is a tendency to apply metaphysical jargon to many expressions and manifestations which are purely literary, to esthetic concepts that have their root in philosophical and religious experience, but which are not of themselves philosophical or theological. The second failing is more to the point. Anyone who has written on Claudel knows the wealth of material he draws on; constant vigilance is required lest we allow Claudel to write for us and, like Barrault, merely provide the thread on which to hang quotations which are beautiful and relevant but nonetheless distracting in their variety, incompleteness and frequency. In this particular case, moreover, a second grief comes to mind: while the pages are often abstracted from Claudel rather than original, the selections used are from works like *Emmaüs*, *Introduction au Livre de Rush*, *Contacts et Circonstances*. We should prefer those of more lasting beauty and worth. While

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*Partage de midi*, *Christophe Colomb* and the five *Odes* may be wholly creative and therefore less revealing than essays of Claudel's objective faith, and while they are also better known and therefore less stimulating to the critic as source material for a new study, they are Claudel more surely than his heavier and less vital excursions.

So we must report that neither of these books is an important addition to Claudel bibliography: Barrault's is of no value; Andrieu's is valid but unoriginal and somewhat too legalistic.

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M. MARTHE LAVALLEE

### Paul Claudel and Theology

(Continued from page 195)

Between the gift of oneself to God in complete forgetfulness of the earth, and a pagan poetic attitude of enjoyment of the universe without God, there is a more complete position, an integral poetic humanism, which consists in knowing all things and God, all things in their providential functions, in their own consistency, indeed, but in as much as the particular destiny of each is harmonized in the whole, which is divinely governed. It is thus the entire world which is discovered in each and every creature given for the enjoyment of the poet. If Claudel loves the sea so much, it is because it has been for him the wide and unique way towards a Christian knowledge of the whole earth, of everything which serves God under the sun. That is the thought which Claudel expresses in these words of *Christophe Colomb*:

"I thirst only for the sea; and I hunger only for the will of God."

TR. FERNAND VIAL

# Book-Reviews

## Ablative Absolute

*Claudel et son art d'écrire.* By Henri Guillemin. Paris: Gallimard.

WITH his long life span, Claudel exhibits better perhaps than any other writer the manifold and persistent connections of modern literature with its past. Living very much in the twentieth century, he said many things which remind us where the twentieth century comes from.

There is his outspoken defense of disorder, a nineteenth-century shock technique which grows unmistakably out of Romanticism and finally wastes away in Dada manifestoes. "L'ordre parle à la raison, mais le désordre parle à l'imagination." Such remarks were once useful to harry the embattled champions of a *status quo*, but today they sound curiously banal and ingenuous. The fact that one has cried such slogans from the housetops shows that one is not entirely of the present world, not because the present world does not believe such things but because it would never think seriously of denying them.

Yet Claudel is certainly of the contemporary world, too, for he helped create it and condition its sensibilities. In particular, his most representative performances, such as *Le soulier de satin*, feature the preoccupation with de-rangement which is a mark of the present age, and which has been made possible, paradoxically, by the accumulation of knowledge over the centuries and a resulting confidence in the inevitability of order which earlier ages could not command. With the Impressionists and Surrealists and Futurists, Claudel makes a fetish of certain surface distortions only because he and his audience are utterly convinced that beneath no matter what distortion, order of some sort presides.

The modern world has enormously enlarged the range of intelligible order by making available to analytic discussion the obscure depths of the psyche where the reasons for "unreasonable" human performances are to be found. This opening up of the depths of the unconscious to communal examination throws an interesting light on the supposed "subjectivity" and "privateness" of much contemporary art and literature, including much of Claudel's. For now that the discoveries of depth psychology have passed into our language and general awareness, the truth is that "subjectivity" can no longer be so subjective and "privateness" can no longer be so private today as heretofore. (This "privateness" is not the same as the "privacy" which Mr. Faulkner has set out recently to defend against all comers, but it is related to this.)

Today, when even a madman's view of the universe can be made, if not plausible or acceptable, at least quite understandable to sane persons, there is very little in anyone's experience which cannot be entered into by others. Thus "difficult" or "private" poetry has an impressive record of success today. Almost nothing else can command the interest of the bulk of serious readers. Nothing else is challenging enough—or rewarding enough. All this means, ironically, that the communal consciousness is not split, but, in a profound way, more unified than before. A good poet can afford to retire into his own private world.

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His readers will only too eagerly follow him. For they know that explicit concepts and articulate words are not man's only public means of communication. The supposedly "peculiar" or "uncontrolled" images and symbols rampant in our inner life are found to be public, too. They may not be "clear" and "distinct," but they have no "private" meaning inaccessible to the exegesis of other persons. It is no wonder, in these circumstances, that Claudel's remarks about derangement in writing and other arts sound very much like those of a psychiatrist: "Ce que vousappelez le désordre est cet ordre créé par le hazard ou par une parenté occulte." This of course sounds like Coleridge, too. Claudel reminds us of the connection between Romanticism and Freud.

The present work does not view Claudel or his art in these or other larger perspectives, but treats his writing in a descriptive rather than an analytic way. It is filled with quotations from Claudel illustrating both his art and style and his opinions about these things. The quotations are mostly brief and are either woven together like a medieval *catena aurea* of the Scriptures or arranged under rubrics such as "Claudel est un homme qui regarde" (followed by a spate of quotations in which Claudel describes things), "Il écoute" (a spate of apposite quotations), "Il a la passion du concret" (apposite quotations). Such textbook classifications, of course, tell us less than the quotations do.

With this method Guillemin does not lead one astray. But the relationships of Claudel with Mallarmé, Rimbaud, the other symbolists, and a host of further writers, including the dramatists recently treated by Joseph Ciardi, are at best rehearsed and catalogued rather than explored with any sustained and penetrating insight. The meaning of the relationships in terms of the development of ideas and sensibility which makes human culture is not profoundly gone into.

One has the feeling in books of this sort that, despite the chatty style, a dialogue between the author and his audience has never really been initiated. Instead of a give-and-take between author and reader, the book suggests a situation in which the author, in the role of a somewhat over-eager teacher, is trying to interest or even entertain youngsters—or perhaps some ladies at a tea—whose attention is elsewhere. His performance is sprightly and energetic, but it remains basically a monologue. The real issues are somehow neglected.

Guillemin shows genuine enthusiasm for Claudel's great achievements and significance within his age, and for his vision and prophetic power. He is, however, aware of certain minor difficulties which Claudel presents—his occasional coltish coarseness and outbreaks of embarrassing bad taste (the distance between a *bon mot* and a *faux pas* is often paper-thin), or his stubborn persistence in grammatical and other deformations which served no ascertainable purpose at any level of discourse. Claudel's explanation of a particularly mystifying aggregate of words which floated unattended at the end of an otherwise straightforwardly organized sentence deserves to be popularized. It was offered apparently to Guillemin himself, who had finally brought himself to ask point blank what in the world the curious tail was, structurally speaking. "An ablative absolute," Claudel responded brightly. The conversation seems to have ended on this note.

## Claudel, By Radio and Journal

"Mémoires Improvisés." By Jean Amrouche. Paris: Gallimard.  
*La Table Ronde*. April, 1955. Issue No. 88.

**M**ÉMOIRES IMPROVISÉS is a volume of the texts of forty-two broadcasts presented over the Chaîne Nationale as *Entretiens avec Paul Claudel* in the *Entretiens avec* series. Claudel's participation in this acclaimed program took place during the intervals of May 21-July 12, 1951 and October 1, 1951-February 14, 1952. It is a source of comfort that these spoken words have not been lost in the air over Europe.

The book remains faithful to the genre of its origin, dialogue, with Jean Amrouche as the initiator of the topics and Paul Claudel as the respondent. The manner of the interviews is neither too restrained nor too flippant, and French humor with its understandings endows the pages with delightful legibility. So, not being a collection of mere Claudeliania, we are provided with prime documentation for Claudel as ambassador, dramatist, essayist, and poet. And we are coaxed into believing that we hear living voices.

It would be impossible, in fact, to report the full wealth of this publication as a ready and genuine source for any consideration of Claudel. The opening pages alone recount how the poet, having finished his studies on a formal level, undertook his own program of reading, which was to have profound effect.

Claudel recalls his turning first to Shakespeare, for one or two years, annotating his copies of the latter's works (lost in the Tokyo disaster), which he read with a dictionary in one hand and a translation in the other. He states, "I learned English in Shakespeare, I can say." Aeschylus was the second stone to be turned over. He then moved on to Sophocles and Euripides, and the Greek tragedians induced him to pursue Dante. And Dante pointed the way back to Vergil. Claudel places the Mantuan swan "perhaps above all." He recalls that Vergil filled him, more than the others, with enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that endured: "I still know entire fragments by heart. I could recite them, if you wish." At the same time, he relates his discovery of Dostoyevsky, "who has served me a great deal, either in my dramatic art, or in the reflections that I have had to make about existence." Other writers discussed in reference to Claudel's growth are Bossuet, Flaubert, Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Rimbaud. Of course, Mallarmé is named.

Subsequently, M. Amrouche and his guest maintain pertinent discussions of *Tête d'or* (both versions) and the significances which are intended in this early play. Details are furnished for Claudel's literary relations with his contemporaries before his departure for America, and for his stay in China. *La Ville, L'Echange, Partage de Midi, l'Art poétique, l'Annonce faite à Marie, Le Soulier de Satin* receive the lion's share of attention, inevitably. There is pointed comment in reference to Gide, Péguy, Jacques Rivière, Bernanos, Proust, Suarès, Alain Fournier, and others.

M. Amrouche and his publisher are to be thanked for this substantial offering, this revelation of Claudel, the people he knew, and the years through which he lived. Indeed, it would be no extravagance to suggest this volume as an excellent summation of the poet's work, or even as an orientation for those

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who are yet to begin their reading of his work, or for those who hope to finish it.

THE APRIL, 1955 issue of *La Table Ronde* (no. 88), devoted to Paul Claudel on the occasion of his death on Ash Wednesday, makes one wonder about the number of scattered items of a similar sort that may be too hastily perused, or overlooked. In the powerful provocations Claudel caused, wittingly or not, many titles certainly should be granted attention, if only on a bibliographical level at first. For example, how many American readers have seen M. Guillemin's careful biography in the *Revue de Paris* (1955)? Or Mr. Hatzfeld's appraisal of Claudel as a Catholic in *Cross Currents* (1955)? Volume LXII, No. 8 (May 27, 1955) of *The Commonwealth* will be missed by how many readers in France and elsewhere? And how many purchasers of *Mémoires improvisés* will remain unaware of M. Jean Amrouche's account, in this issue of *La Table Ronde*, of the genesis of the Claudel radio series (pp. 126-9)?

For other reasons, too, the critical notices and testimony of respect and friendship, plus the unedited letters, offered in this number of *La Table Ronde* would be reason enough to acknowledge this eighty-eighth issue as good reading for whoever would choose to read Claudel. Not only touching in its homage, this publication is filled with suggestions for wider ranging and deeper probings into the Claudelian vastness.

Henri Mondor's luminary essay examines *l'Endormie* for signs of precocity (Claudel wrote this work at the age of fifteen). He demonstrates with careful scholarship that as a schoolboy he showed early signs of vigor in language and concept, that he was an announcement of himself. M. Chaigne notes, in the second piece, the occasions when he met Claudel, and he offers a precious glimpse of the moment when Renan kissed Claudel while giving him academic prizes in the presence of Romain Rolland, Fortunat Strowski, Joseph Bédier, and the others graduating in his class.

Robert d'Harcourt bases his contribution upon Claudel's presentation of "this combat between God and a creature" on a supra-Cornelian level. It would have been interesting if M. d'Harcourt had considered *Polyeucte* specifically, where Corneille reaches the highest level of his dramatic intent. M. Albert-Marie is more modern in his approach: he treats Claudel in terms of symbolism, and credits him not only with "the supreme synthesis of all notions elaborated in the laboratories of Symbolism," but also with coming to his vision in the fashion of Ronsard and Du Bartas.

Christian Murciaux has a lengthier notice, for he attempts to balance the 'Claudelian disposition towards contemplation and immobility with the public career of the diplomat, this mobile person of whom Claudel himself wrote that he "never knows where he will be tomorrow." Crediting the poet with an astonishing ability to synthesize "the political situation of the moment" while writing his verse in exile, he offers separate accounts of the French consul at Fou Tcheou ("the birth of the great Claudelian theater dates from his first sojourn in China"), Prague, Rome, Brazil, the United States, and Belgium. The world was his apple, M. Murciaux suggests, remembering Rodrigue's speech, "le globe! une pomme qu'on peut tenir dans sa main."

Jacques Chevalier offers texts by Charles-Louis Philippe, Jacques Rivière, and Joseph Malègue. These writings, brief to be sure, will be devoured by

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those seeking light for the question of whether or not Claudel remained narrowly on the path of his own glory, without a care for those still seeking to make their way in letters, or whether he was willing to stop and lend a helping hand, to give a word of encouragement to those less sure of sitting in the citadel.

But, as in the case of *Mémoires improvisés*, it is impossible to report everything: what is described thus far is only pp. 11-42. There is much else. Pierre Sipriot speaks of Claudel's doctrine and "position morale"; Romain Rolland and Jean Variot have observations to make in reference to *l'Annonce faite à Marie*; M. A. Hamman writes on Claudel and the Bible; Pierre Barbier concerns himself with Claudel and "happiness of expression"; Jean Guitton closes the series of essays with "Il Est," but not before Stanislas Fumet has described the difference between "abstract art" and "modern art" in reference to the tireless imagination of Paul Claudel.

Separate mention should be made of the letters that are published for the first time in this issue of *La Table Ronde*. There are ten letters from Claudel to Marie Kalf; eight from Claudel to Henri Massis; one (5 pages printed) from Claudel to Louis Gillet; one letter from Henri de Waroquier to Claudel, and another letter by Claudel in answer. The editors of *La Table Ronde* have been careful to furnish notes explaining the importance of each of the correspondents' interest and importance.

The plan of the entire issue is especially satisfying since, as in the case of *Mémoires improvisés* the chronological scheme is followed. And each essay is prefaced, à la Stendhal, with a pertinent extract from Claudel's writings. This number of *La Table Ronde* should be placed as a volume in the Claudel section by thoughtful and aware librarians. It is meaty enough to be read more than once.

SPIRE PITOU

## Songs for Christmas

*American Twelfth Night and Other Poems.* By Sister M. Madeleva. Macmillan. \$2.00.

CHRISTMAS and song go well together, especially when the singer is as good as Sister Madeleva. Her latest collection continues to bear the imprint of fine artistic integrity. Sister Madeleva's talent may not be a major one, but it is real and finely cultivated. If she were a tennis player she would be a Ken Rosewall or a Garner Molloy. Her lyrical ground-stroking has always been a thing of formal beauty. There is purpose behind every word, every vowel and consonant. She knows where her rhymes are going and what they're going to do when they get there. I do not mean to imply that her work is ultra-conservative. But I do suggest that it is different from the work of many contemporary poets and that the latter might study Madeleva with profit. Time is an old pro who says neither poets nor tennis players can get very far without disciplined ground strokes.

*American Twelfth Night and Other Poems* is a collection of early and later religious lyrics which make the little town of Bethlehem live again in lyric beauty. These poems originated in places as diverse as Provence, Hungary and

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California, and this diversity contributes to the variety-in-unity which characterizes the slender twenty-nine-poem volume. Some of these poems, such as "The Light" or "A Nun Speaks to Mary," are personal; but never so personal as to make the reader feel like an eavesdropper on a private devotion. Aware from the start that poetry is a public rather than an essentially private utterance, Sister Madeleva always makes room for the reader. In this collection of Christmas verse she—and her readers—become successively identified with the Virgin, with Joseph, Elizabeth, angels, shepherds and even the Christmas wind and stars. Her poetic insight merges the first Christmas with today, the Eucharist with the Incarnation, and brings Wise Men from the *West* with their gifts of gold, freedom and "a lost continent." Every Christian will find at least one poem in this collection that will make Christmas live for him. And some people will love them all.

Sister Madeleva's rhythmic patterns tend to be iambic, but she is capable of variety and brilliance. Her rhyme schemes, whether conventional or original, are always handled with precision. She is at her technical best in the demanding forms such as the sonnet or the ballade. Consider, for instance, the opening stanza of "Ballade for the Queen of the World";

It is not innocent organdy and lace;  
It is not aureoles of lady-blue  
That make illustrious haloes for your face  
To crown the girl, the woman that is you.  
Don any raiment of whatever hue;  
Wear it with all the terrible grace you dare;  
Make it an open secret. But the clue?  
Who clothes you with the wonder that you wear?

Her "Christmas, 1941" invites comparison with Thomas Merton's "Christmas, 1939," and her "Christmas in Provence" with Robert Lowell's "Christmas at Black Rock," just as several of her lyrics drive us back to Rilke to see how he treated the same subjects. I hope it is not unfair to Sister Madeleva to say that she suffers by comparison with these poets. I think she would be the first to agree. I also think that she would suggest, in her beautifully modulated voice, that there is really no reason for making the comparison. And she is right: she is one kind of poet; they, another. And yet, someone who has heard that Sister Madeleva is one of America's best-known religious lyricists is bound to inquire why he hasn't read about her in the critical journals which discuss leading contemporary poets, why the golden incantation of critical terms like "myth," "symbolic action," "tension," "irony," "figure and ground" has never hovered around the name of Sister Madeleva. The answer is easy. Sister Madeleva is so complex as to be simple and so simple as to defy complex analysis. She has absolutely no need to create a private-public myth because her approach to religion, which myth struggles obliquely to approach, is direct. Her symbolic action is nice rather than pyrotechnic and when we say her symbols are just what one could wish and that there is even more discipline involved in doing it Madeleva's way rather than St.-John Perse's, we have said all that need be said. There is relatively little tension or irony in Madeleva's work. Her frame of reference is too secure, her inner lift too serene. The certainties by which she lives, whether as Christian or poet, leave no room for

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the anguished quest which racks so many contemporary artists. The tension which we do find in Madeleva's poetry is poetic rather than the combined linguistic-ideational tension of much modern verse. And one does not have to resort to psychoanalysis or Gestalt psychology to probe her imagery. Madeleva's images are all clean, conscious, and full of light.

T. S. Eliot has stated that a poet who repeats himself should stop writing. Sister Madeleva has fortunately refused to listen to Mr. Eliot. For more than thirty years she has been repeating herself under the impression that the truth she has glimpsed is eternal and the beauty timeless. It is well that she has done so, for with each of her publications a multitude of new readers are offered the opportunity of encountering poetry that is neither modern nor outmoded—just beautiful.

St. John's University

THOMAS J. BEARY

### The Wood Is Alive

*Poems: A Selection.* By Léonie Adams. Funk and Wagnall. \$3.00.

THE publication of Léonie Adams' *Poems: A Selection* is an occasion for joy to all who value distilled lyricism, subtlety, candor, and high craftsmanship. The conferring of the Shelley Memorial Award and the Harriet Monroe Prize is a tribute to the qualities which have been praised by such exacting critics as Allen Tate, Louise Bogan, and Wallace Fowlie.

The first section of the book, "Fruits of Two Seasons," contains new poems; the second, "As Apt Was Joy," contains selections from *Those Not Elect* (1925) and *High Falcon* (1929). The poems are about the human person, child of infinity, intent on nature, accurately appraising both hazard and felicity in a world where "Sable and gold match lustres and contend." Those who served their apprenticeship to poetry under the triple constellation of Donne, Hopkins, and Léonie Adams will find in *Poems: A Selection* all the art and insight that won their first allegiance.

Among the poems there is only one with a distinctly indoor scene, "At Tea One Bitter Afternoon." "The wood is her most familiar setting . . . but the leaves are those of the mind," Mr. Fowlie has said. The wood is alive, changing, an intricate dance of gold and green, of light and shadow; its roots reach the "waters quickening underground," its branches mingle with a sky "more thick with stars than fields with dew." The material wood is transfigured into the metaphorical, where spring looks out of autumn in an "air as of two airs." The chiaroscuro is of infinite gradation—shade upon shade shot through with brightness, and over all the slow dance of the stars—Aldebaran, Orion, Cassiopeia, "the anointed sun" and "the spellworking moon." In their levels of significance and mystery some of these landscapes recall Stefan George's lyrics, though in spirit they are wholly different.

Unlike those poets who conduct their education in public, Miss Adams draws quietly upon cultural richness long assimilated. Ignoring current fashions, she is simultaneously traditional and innovating. Despite their wealth of image and vocabulary, the poems are ordered by a chaste and rigorous mind. It is extraordinary how often the idea of *cold* occurs with all its variants: chill, cool, frosty.

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And characteristically, the concept is not always literal—Death is the “cool lord of chances”; the fox has “a cold scream.”

The temper of these poems is contemplative but never aloof or self-centered. Compassion for the first wounds of youth inspires “Valhalla for the Living.” Shared joys and questionings permeate “Magnificent in Little,” “An Old Spell,” and “Many Mansions.”

In her poems about old people, Miss Adams avoids the usual clichés. “Song from a Country Fair” relates:

While half afraid their children stood,  
I saw the old come out to dance.

Among the new poems, “When Green” is a moving evocation of a child walking with an old man who will not give her a hint of the sorrow and peril that may await her:

Griefs which waste from the bone he left unsaid,  
And chances to befall a callow breast;  
His speech was words from a speller, stories  
Of the favored of time at rest.

One of the best of these poems, “Kingdom of Heaven,” tells how on earth’s last day the old will awaken singing in their beds to a sound like “a noise of yellow bees when the hay is nodding deep.” A soft voice answers them:

Hush, for all the sound you tell  
Is out of an old horn I blew.  
I am come down to see who woke  
On earth’s cold brink when night was through.  
No wilder chance befell  
Than the starry breath I drew:  
I am Gabriel.

But the consummation of joy in such a poem does not make the poet oblivious of those not elect. She has looked at the morass:

Where holy and unholy are as weak as water  
We encounter the damned god.

The struggle is racking but not forever. The burdened heart goes harried through darkness to an end of gold. One might say of her poems what she has said of Louise Bogan’s: “A large part of their moral force derives from the refusal to be deluded or to be overborne.”

Several of the poems here reprinted show slight revisions, always in the direction of economy and precision. A number of earlier poems have been omitted from this volume. One regrets the absence of “Our Lady of Victory,” “Hilltop Churchyard,” and the sonnet “Exhortation” which ends with memorable lines:

Some that like you were overarched with doom,  
Royal ones, bitterly set on, held their ease,  
And breath and bone, but not their pride were beaten.  
Graces you know, and graces should have room,  
And beauty, pause; nor these, their courtesies,  
The loutish time with all his sour unsweeten.

The later poems resemble the earlier ones in their marvelous landscapes, both

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physical and metaphysical; in their pure line and rich melody; in their range of wit and compassion. They are more concentrated in language. Not that they are constricted, but they require more concentration than the average reader, even the reader of modern poetry, is likely to give. I can affirm that whoever lives with these lines will be haunted by them.

When John Ciardi reviewed this book for the *Nation*, he admitted its merits, but objected that it does not show the mark of our time. Of the sonnet, "Alas, Kind Element," he said that for all its excellence it contains no internal evidence of having been written later than the seventeenth century. (Unfortunately, in reprinting the poem, Mr. Ciardi or his editor substituted for the poet's *wishful* the maudlin *wistful*—a word which I am sure Léonie Adams has never used in her life.) It is true that the quick impact of the current event is absent from the poems. Yet to say that they are not contemporary is wrong. In line after line, the pressure and tone of our day are manifest, most of all perhaps in the great lyric, "The Runner with the Lots," where in a timeless image the constant heart faces the recurrent dooms of man, perceiving

Before us, unbeguiled,  
The equal feet of love  
And the blind hands bearing the luck of the year.

"The best commentators," says Wallace Fowlie, "will be prudent and humble." Other critics will join him in specifying the excellences of Léonie Adams' work. The present review is intended as a small payment on a debt of honor contracted during college days when these poems first gave me "names for the silvery ascensions of joy" and for the "will that churned alone."

Rosary College

SISTER MARY JEREMY, O.P.

## A Steady Growth

*The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges. The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson.* Ed. Claude Collee Abbott. 2v. Oxford. \$11.50.

EXACTLY twenty years have passed since these volumes first appeared. In spite of their costliness they have long been out of print, and it is fortunate that they are again available.

During the intervening two decades there have been profound changes in the evaluation of Hopkins, and these changes have in part been due to the careful study of these two books. In them critics have found the same disciplined honesty and intensity of conviction as in Hopkin's poems; they have discovered explanations of his prosody, his literary methods, his poetic and religious ideals; they have learned the multiplicity of his interests, important revelations of his character, and the constancy of his dedication. The result has been a steady growth in the stature of Hopkins.

But twenty years of scholarship have by no means exhausted the volumes of primary materials. To take one instance, no one has thus far produced, on the basis of the letters, a really significant study of Hopkins as a literary critic. One of the weakest chapters in a generally strong two volume work by W. G.

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Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition* is entitled "Hopkins as Reader and Critic"; and the essays by M. G. Lloyd Thomas ("Hopkins as Critic," *Essays and Studies*, 1946) and Anne Treneer ("The Criticism of G. M. Hopkins," *The Penguin New Writing*, No. 40, 1950) are inadequate. The *Letters* and *Correspondence* remain, therefore, a rich mine whose resources are still to be fully explored.

When Abbott originally edited the two volumes in 1935 he did his work so well that hardly any changes in the text of the letters and in the notes and appendices have been necessary. In the new impression he has made minor corrections, added tables to bring the numbering of the poems into conformity with the latest edition of the poems, and corrected errors in the Index.

Abbott's work is a model of careful editing, except for the fact that he has, unfortunately, retained his original Introductions in which he expresses his own views about the relation of the priest to the poet, views which many of the studies in the past twenty years have qualified.

It is unfortunate, too—though in this case, of course, Abbott is not at fault—that there has emerged no explanation as to why Bridges destroyed his part of the correspondence.

Even more important than the republication of these two books is the announcement that they will be followed by a new edition of *Further Letters* which will be enlarged by the addition of a number of family letters (I understand it will contain fifty or more to his mother) discovered when the poet's last remaining brother died in 1952, for the absence of family letters has been an important lacuna in Hopkins materials. This announcement, along with the catalog of other unprinted materials by D. Anthony Bischoff, S.J. (in "The Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins," *Thought*, XXVI, Winter 1951-1952) gives promise that the ultimate evaluation of Hopkins will be based on the firm foundation of adequate primary materials.

JOHN PICK

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### Love and Error

*Letters from Baron von Hügel to a Niece.* Edited by Gwendolen Greene. Regnery. \$3.75.

IT IS pleasant to see von Hügel's most popular book published under Catholic auspices, with an *imprimatur* and prefaced by a well-known Paulist priest, Fr. John B. Sheerin, Editor of the *Catholic World*. From the point of view of orthodoxy von Hügel has remained a somewhat equivocal personality. As a Catholic, he was self-educated in a period and within an environment that tended toward the passive orthodoxy of those not interested in the meaning of their faith or toward a liberal outlook that at best was nominally Catholic. Interested as a scholar and thinker (but without any idea of being a writer, still less an apologist, for the Faith) in current problems of the relations between religion and scientific history, he felt a good deal more at home with non-Catholic experts than with Catholics whom he felt, rightly or wrongly, were more interested in defending Catholic orthodoxy at any price than in searching for the truth. He himself moreover had a passion for truth, and it hardly occurred to him that his resolution to pursue truth at any cost could endanger a faith ardently lived in

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a rich and devoted personal spiritual life. Only looking back can one judge that von Hügel's error here was not one of principle, but of a certain *naïvété*, easily understood in view of his self-tuition, about the honesty and intrinsic merits of the great scholars of his day. And in so far as he did begin to see that his friends were not quite so profound as he expected, he was moved both by a sense of loyalty and friendship, as well as by a burning desire to help them to a fuller truth, to stand by them as long as possible. This was especially the case with the unfortunate Loisy. And the mention of Loisy reminds us that the crisis of von Hügel's life occurred during the Modernist period when the Pope, after having manifested a considerable personal indulgence to men who, as we now know, had already virtually lost the faith, felt it necessary for the good of all to make sweeping condemnations which necessarily included true Catholics exploring dangerous paths as well as men who still claimed the Catholic name, while having lost the essence of their faith.

Actually von Hügel himself, who in a certain sense served as a liaison officer between the very different types of modernists in a number of countries, escaped all condemnation, and Cardinal Bourne in England gave him the assurance that he would never bother him. This was certainly the result of his marked personal holiness, his patent sincerity and innocence and his immense spiritual influence especially among Anglicans. It therefore ill becomes us now to be more Catholic than the Church and suspect the man she never condemned, even though it would be our duty to frankly admit the actual errors which some of his books in fact contained. The truth is that von Hügel was much bigger, personally much deeper in his Catholicity, than his works. No one who knew him could think of him as anything but as a man of God possessing the fulness of the Faith. This is confirmed by the unchallengeable fact that his spiritual influence was outstanding.

Happily we have in the present volume nothing but the best of von Hügel, that best which the student of his more scholarly works has quietly to glean. In it we are far away from the higher Biblical criticism, from the puzzles of philosophy, from ecclesiastical controversy; we are with the von Hügel who so readily turned from his learned friends and heavy books to love and instruct children in the Faith. Yet it is the same mind, the same person who loved to do both, and it is the same Faith which he served in both roles.

True, his niece was no child, but the letters which he wrote to her, an Anglican, were written by an old and affectionate uncle to a favourite niece with her "very rare) youthfulness and keen ardour of mind." Simple though they may be, they reflect the true, full von Hügel with his typical insistence that true Christianity orientates towards God and impregnates with God the richness of human experience in time and space. Hence his insistence on *breadth* of education in his delightful, profound and painstaking advice on his niece's reading. One sometimes has to smile at the old scholar's meticulous and detailed advice, e.g. about how to take notes. But it is always impossible to analyse von Hügel without destroying him. The whole characteristic man was in everything he did and said—that queer, heavy style which nevertheless is so refreshing; the odd stories and examples, yet so appropriate; the exaggerated endearments which so naively expressed his deep human affection; the passing from one subject to another and the seemingly accidental sliding into magnificent material as in that wonderful letter of May 5, 1919.

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Of course, these are letters carefully trimmed to an individual's need, but in the great books dealing with difficult and scholarly subjects (not rarely erroneously) the same sincere, natural personality shows itself at work throughout, searching, probing, feeling towards the live, dynamic truth as opposed to the clear, accurate, but too often dead, formula. I have found few people who have tried to bury themselves in von Hügel, however tough the subject-matter and involved the style, who have not soon found themselves captivated not so much by what is said but by the sayer. It is *he* who always wins. He seems to conquer not only his reader but also himself and his mistakes.

That is why it is such a pleasure to see this simplest of Von Hügel's books republished with all the attendant Catholic blessings. While Catholic authority would never guarantee all that von Hügel wrote and said, it would—and did—guarantee *him* as a great and rare Catholic soul. May I end by saying that only a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of a conversation with his youngest and only surviving child, Theckla, now Sub-Priress of the Carmel in Kensington, London. She wanted to thank me for having defended the essential Catholicity of her father in the *Life of von Hügel* which I wrote. I could not help feeling in my turn that so many years in Carmel were a guarantee that her kindly gratitude was not based only on her affection for her father, but on the fruit of her own meditations and colloquies with God. Her father, let us not forget, was her first and closest teacher in the Faith which she has so long served by her prayers and penances.

COUNT MICHAEL DE LA BEDOYERE

### The Reaching Hand

*Am Tor des Himmels.* By Gertrud von le Fort. Wiesbaden: Insel-Verlag.

**A**N IMAGINARY seventeenth century Inquisitional trial and considerations engendered by aerial destruction intermingle in this work. The author demonstrates ability to link problems of the past with those of the present: she probes similar dimensions of their underlying causality.

The liberal plot is of importance in externalizing a psychological experience. A narrator describes his return to a family mansion, during World War II, for the purpose of recovering a valuable document three centuries old. An air raid sounds, but a young atomic scientist, distantly related to the family, insists upon reading the yellowed sheets. They unfold a tragic story of loss of faith during the era when discoveries were shattering the time-hallowed cosmographies and when churchmen vainly attempted to stifle the new learning.

The reading concluded, bombs begin to fall. The two men flee from a ruined shelter through the streets paved with flame. Later, after Hiroshima, they meet again. The scientist is about to leave for America to further atomic investigation: he thinks Hiroshima will be surpassed. Both men lack religious faith.

It is the ancient document itself, however, which provides the key to the riddle of faith that the author proposes. A great master of astronomy is haled before a Roman tribunal of the Inquisition. Diana, one of his students, in gazing through a telescope, loses her faith in God. She cries out in anguish: "Only the external laws of the universe and ourselves endure . . . Henceforth must mankind be all things to mankind." She is spirited away to a convent by

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her uncle, the cardinal, who is presiding over the master's trial. His vote makes unanimous the charge of heresy which falls with awe-inspiring indifference from the lips of the assembled prelates and theologians. Ironically, the cardinal is privately an ardent follower of the master, and he knew the teachings were not necessarily contrary to religious belief. But he was afraid they would cause loss of faith in men of lesser intelligence. He enunciates his own fault and that of his time when, elaborating on the inadequacies of the human element, he declares, "Peter attempted to walk upon the water and sank." He remains unmoved when it is objected that Peter did not sink, but rather grasped the hand of Christ. At the end of the trial, the master, himself a believer, recants his "error." His secretly watching follower flees horrified from the palace. He must carry on the master's work. He is about to enter a church to ask God's blessing on his efforts, but suddenly stops. It is the new science that prevents him from entering; rather, in the light of what he has witnessed, his foot simply "resists the threshold" and he joins the ranks of the unbelievers.

Under the shadow of Hiroshima and modern scientific discoveries, this apparent conflict between reason and revelation remains basically the same. There are some individual differences, however. Diana could cry out that only the external laws and mankind endure. The modern scientist states that, perhaps as the outermost boundaries of knowledge are reached, God will again be found; it is indeed becoming increasingly difficult to explain a universe without a Creator.

The work closes on an uncertain note. But the author makes us realize that man is always "at the gate of heaven." The gap between faith and science would close instantly, if we would but grasp the hand of Christ. The climax of the book is reached when the cardinal, after unconsciously portraying his own spiritual insufficiency, turns in anger and asks, "And how do you propose we should grasp Christ's hand? Where is this hand in this our day?"

The *novelle* is equal to von le Fort's best creations in this genre. She creates an imaginative, legendary past and projects it with color and understanding. In her picture of the Inquisition she portrays a tribunal without the breath of holiness; yet she never violates religious sensibility. Her descriptive passages are quietly compelling. The work is at once a challenge to faith and a psychological document of contemporary unbelief.

St. Michael's College

JOHN J. DEVLIN, JR.

## The Ignorant Experts

*Le déclin de la sagesse.* By Gabriel Marcel. Paris: Plon.

IN AN unpublished book of world history, the Czech historian Bohdan Chudoba makes a very fruitful distinction between civilization and culture: civilization he regards as everything that has been bequeathed by the past to any particular generation (or man); culture represents the present creative activity of men in, and upon, this inheritance. Evidently the tension these two factors produce can be in a condition of either vital equilibrium or destructive unbalance. It is the destructive conflict between the heritage of the past and modern technocratic ideals that Gabriel Marcel analyses in his latest book, a skillfully orchestrated suite of three thoughtful and characteristic essays: *Les limites de la*

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*civilisation industrielle, La notion d'héritage spirituel, L'Éclatement de la notion de sagesse.*

His theme is, as always, man's self-betrayal, due to the Fall a perennial temptation which in our time receives an unusually generous welcome. Why should this be the case? Today the opportunities for deception are multiplied. Ours is an industrial era: we are seduced by the authority of method and power—the twin muses of Descartes and Bacon: we take the part for the whole and shrink our lives to suit its limited dimensions. Adapting a phrase from Spengler, Marcel says, in his opening essay, that our industrial society "est commandée par des valeurs faustiennes."

From this starting-point, he proceeds to illustrate, by exploring some of the chief features of our contemporary milieu, his general thesis. The industrialized world, he contends, makes use of techniques which, subject to an indefinite perfectibility and success, deceive men into adopting these criteria as universally valid, and encourages the production of a civilization increasingly ineffective in serving the full range of human capabilities. Man is in process of dehumanizing himself in the name of efficiency.

Industrial progress (the argument continues) depends upon controlling the forces of nature by more and more elaborate and effective techniques. Mastery of technique leads to a contempt of anyone ignorant of it, therefore to a grievous and wide-spread rupture between man and man (the "broken world" dissected in Marcel's Gifford Lectures of 1949-50), and to discrediting all those superior human powers of control and discipline—moral in origin—and the world of ends which are "meta-technical." Gratitude and veneration for our spiritual heritage are practically non-existent; the past and its riches are considered an onerous burden to be dumped as quickly as possible; youth is exalted over age, maturity rejected for novelty. Our predecessors do not so much deliver us the past as a gift, Marcel insists, as appeal to us to allow nothing be lost. Continuity of value demands its constant renewal, actively performed by successive generations. Memory therefore must be visualized as creative, and so with conservation; a static repetition is to be avoided at all costs. But everything that continuity implies becomes impossible where perfection of technique is the sole ambition, because the rule there is to substitute new for old. How many people continued to use horse and carriage once the automobile was universalized? The success of total replacement in the evolution of techniques has infected questions of morals, politics, aesthetics, etc., and so wide has been its influence that it has even corrupted the common sense solidity of the non-professional public who compose the majority of any national population. The depreciation of wisdom (the theme of the third essay) has overcome the multitude, not the few.

The greatest loss, however, it is emphasized, occurs in the realm of human encounters, where we are compelled to seek the face of a brother, a comrade, a friend, in the unfamiliar features of every man we meet. Here it is that man capable-of-a-certain-function has been substituted for integral man, the creature capable of creative thought and love, whom it is our privilege to love.

*Le déclin de la sagesse* falls into place as the latest addition to that extended diagnosis of the modern age which is Marcel's philosophical *œuvre*. It is not at all a compendium of the barbarous horrors that this age of technocracy has cultivated, as it might have been in the hands of a less profound, unsubtle writer; it

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is an examination of symptoms, which deflates the comfortable illusion of this age's success; it sketches the character of the age, its values and their limits, and draws our attention to the concrete results of accepting them as absolute. Proceeding by a method seemingly tentative and hesitant, Marcel creates an effect of overwhelming conviction.

Feeling oneself so much his debtor after completing the book, with one's own thought sharpened and illuminated, it is disappointing to experience, too, a desire to protest, to chide. Again and again, at every point where one looks for him to come to grips with some problem—such as, in his second essay, what is the basis for evaluating the spiritual heritage with which we are endowed?—M. Marcel's analysis dissolves into indefinite and metaphorical language; it is the same when he considers remedies for the sickness whose symptoms he studies. To what avail to write of "*une philosophie de la lumière ou de l'éclairant*" when we are not even given a definition of this spiritual heritage? Perhaps that is his explicit intention; it would seem to be, for, writing that he plans to interrogate himself on the notion of wisdom, he says "*non pas exactement sur son contenu, mais plutôt sur les possibilités d'incarnation qu'elle conserve dans le monde qui est le nôtre.*" Perhaps he wishes only to help formulate an attitude or disposition, to prepare a sympathetic climate, to reawaken interest, to prime the mind so to speak and increase its receptivity. These admirable ends that he accomplishes—and in fact more—wonderfully well, nevertheless leave the mind unsatisfied. Not that one looks for final satisfaction in this life, only for somewhat more than Marcel provides. One would like to see him give a little greater recognition to the sub-structure which his own thought presupposes.

Writing in 1935 of Gabriel Marcel's kind of existentialism (a word it was then still fitting to use about him), Marcel de Corte said that "*son rôle serait propédeutique et pédagogique.*" This perhaps earliest word on Gabriel Marcel may well turn out to be the last.

ROBERT OSTERMANN

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